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The first Perry Mason short story — complete with courtroom climax and legal legerdemain

THE CASE OF THE IRATE WITNESS

by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

THE EARLY-MORNING SHADOWS cast by the mountains still lay heavily on the town's main street as the big siren on the roof of the Jebson Commercial Company began to scream shrilly.

The danger of fire was always present, and at the sound, men at breakfast rose and pushed their chairs back from the table. Men who were shaving barely paused to wipe lather from their faces; men who had been sleeping grabbed the first available garments. All of them ran to places where they could look for the first telltale wisps of smoke.

There was no smoke.

The big siren was still screaming urgently as the men formed into streaming lines, like ants whose hill has been attacked. The lines all moved toward the Jebson Commercial Company.

There the men were told that the doors of the big vault had been found wide open. A jagged hole had been cut into one door with an acetylene torch.

The men looked at one another silently. This was the fifteenth of the month. The big, twice-a-month payroll, which had been brought up from the Ivanhoe National Bank the day before, had been the prize.

Frank Bernal, manager of the company's mine, the man who ruled Jebson City with an iron hand, arrived and took charge. The responsibility was his, and what he found was alarming.

Tom Munson, the night watchman, was lying on the floor in a back room, snoring in drunken slumber. The burglar alarm, which had been installed within the last six months, had been bypassed by means of an electrical device. This device was so ingenious that it was apparent that, if the work were that of a gang, at least one of the burglars was an expert electrician.

Ralph Nesbitt, the company accountant, was significantly silent. When Frank Bernal had been appointed manager a year earlier, Nesbitt had pointed out that the big vault was obsolete.

Bernal, determined to prove himself in his new job, had avoided the expense of tearing out the old vault and installing a new one by investing in an up-to-date burglar alarm and

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putting a special night watchman on duty.

Now the safe had been looted of $100,000 and Frank Bernal had to make a report to the main office in Chicago, with the disquieting knowledge that Ralph Nesbitt's memo stating that the antiquated vault was a pushover was at this moment reposing in the company files.

Some distance out of Jebson City, Perry Mason, the famous trial lawyer, was driving fast along a mountain road. He had planned a weekend fishing trip for a long time, but a jury which had waited until midnight before reaching its verdict had delayed Mason's departure and it was now 8:30 in the morning.

His fishing clothes, rod, wading boots, and creel were all in the trunk. He was wearing the suit in which he had stepped from the courtroom, and having driven all night he was eager for the cool, piny mountains.

A blazing red light, shining directly at him as he rounded a turn in the canyon road, dazzled his road-weary eyes. A sign, *STOP — POLICE*, had been placed in the middle of the road. Two men, a grim-faced man with a .30–30 rifle in his hands and a silver badge on his shirt and a uniformed motorcycle officer, stood beside the sign.

Mason stopped his car.

The man with the badge, deputy sheriff, said, "We'd better take a look at your driving license. There's been a big robbery at Jebson City."

"That so?" Mason said. "I went through Jebson City an hour ago and everything seemed quiet."

'Where you been since then?"

"I stopped at a little service station and restaurant for breakfast."

"Let's take a look at your driving license."

Mason handed it to him.

The man started to return it, then looked at it again. "Say," he said, "you're Perry Mason, the big criminal lawyer!"

"Not a criminal lawyer," Mason said patiently, "a trial lawyer. I sometimes defend men who are accused of crime."

"What are you doing up in this country?"

"Going fishing."

The deputy looked at him suspiciously. "Why aren't you wearing your fishing clothes?"

"Because," Mason said, and smiled, "I'm not fishing."

"You said you were going fishing."

"I also intend," Mason said, "to go to bed tonight. According to you, I should be wearing my pajamas."

The deputy frowned. The traffic officer laughed and waved Mason on.

The deputy nodded at the departing car. "Looks like a live clue to me," he said, "but I can't find it in that conversation."

"There isn't any," the traffic officer said.

The deputy remained dubious, and later on, when a news-hungry reporter

from the local paper asked the deputy if he knew of anything that would make a good story, the deputy said that he did.

And that was why Della Street, Perry Mason's confidential secretary, was surprised to read stories in the metropolitan papers stating that Perry Mason, the noted trial lawyer, was rumored to have been retained to represent the person or persons who had looted the vault of the Jebson Commercial Company. All this had been arranged, it would seem, before Mason's "client" had even been apprehended.

When Perry Mason called his office by long-distance the next afternoon, Della said, "I thought you were going to the mountains for a vacation."

"That's right. Why?"

"The papers claim you're representing whoever robbed the Jebson Commercial Company."

"First I've heard of it," Mason said. "I went through Jebson City before they discovered the robbery, stopped for breakfast a little farther on, and then got caught in a roadblock. In the eyes of some officious deputy, that seems to have made me an accessory after the fact."

"Well," Della Street said, "they've caught a man by the name of Harvey L. Corbin, and apparently have quite a case against him. They're hinting at mysterious evidence which won't be disclosed until the time of trial."

"Was he the one who committed the crime?" Mason asked.

"The police think so. He has a criminal record. When his employers at Jebson City found out about it, they told him to leave town. That was the evening before the robbery."

"Just like that, eh?" Mason asked.

"Well, you see, Jebson City is a one-industry town, and the company owns all the houses. They're leased to the employees. I understand Corbin's wife and daughter were told they could stay on until Corbin got located in a new place, but Corbin was told to leave town at once. You aren't interested, are you?"

"Not in the least," Mason said, "except that when I drive back I'll be going through Jebson City, and I'll probably stop to pick up the local gossip."

"Don't do it," she warned. "This man Corbin has all the earmarks of being an underdog, and you know how you feel about underdogs."

A quality in her voice made Perry suspicious. "You haven't been approached, have you, Della?"

"Well," she said, "in a way. Mrs. Corbin read in the papers that you were going to represent her husband, and she was overjoyed. It seems that she thinks her husband's implication in this is a raw deal. She hadn't known anything about his criminal record, but she loves him and is going to stand by him."

"You've talked with her?" Mason asked.

"Several times. I tried to break it to her gently. I told her it was probably nothing but a newspaper story. You

see, Chief, they have Corbin dead to rights. They took some money from his wife as evidence. It was part of the loot."

"And she has nothing?"

"Nothing. Corbin left her forty dollars, and they took it all as evidence."

"I'll drive all night," he said. "Tell her I'll be back tomorrow."

"I was afraid of that," Della Street said. "Why did you have to call up? Why couldn't you have stayed up there fishing? Why did you have to get your name in the papers?"

Mason laughed and hung up.

Paul Drake, of the Drake Detective Agency, came in and sat in the big chair in Mason's office and said, "You have a bear by the tail, Perry."

"What's the matter, Paul? Didn't your detective work in Jebson City pan out?"

"It panned out all right, but the stuff in the pan isn't what you want, Perry," Drake explained.

"How come?"

"Your client's guilty."

"Go on," Mason said.

"The money he gave his wife was some of what was stolen from the vault."

"How do they know it was the stolen money?" Mason asked.

Drake pulled a notebook from his pocket. "Here's the whole picture. The plant manager runs Jebson City. There isn't any private property. The Jebson company controls everything."

"Not a single small business?"

Drake shook his head. "Not unless you want to consider garbage collecting as small business. An old coot by the name of George Addey lives five miles down the canyon; he has a hog ranch and collects the garbage. He's supposed to have the first nickel he ever earned. Buries his money in cans. There's no bank nearer than Ivanhoe City."

"What about the burglary? The men who did it must have moved in acetylene tanks and —"

"They took them right out of the company store," Drake said. And then he went on: "Munson, the watchman, likes to take a pull out of a flask of whiskey along about midnight. He says it keeps him awake. Of course, he's not supposed to do it, and no one was supposed to know about the whiskey, but someone did know about it. They doped the whiskey with a barbiturate. The watchman took his usual swig, went to sleep, and stayed asleep."

"What's the evidence against Corbin?" Mason asked.

"Corbin had a previous burglary record. It's a policy of the company not to hire anyone with a criminal record. Corbin lied about his past and got a job. Frank Bernal, the manager, found out about it, sent for Corbin about 8 o'clock the night the burglary took place, and ordered him out of town. Bernal agreed to let Corbin's wife and child stay on in the house until Corbin could get located in another city. Corbin pulled out in

the morning, and gave his wife this money. It was part of the money from the burglary."

"How do they know?" Mason asked.

"Now there's something I don't know," Drake said. "This fellow Bernal is pretty smart, and the story is that he can prove Corbin's money was from the vault."

Drake paused, then continued: "The nearest bank is at Ivanhoe City, and the mine pays off in cash twice a month. Ralph Nesbitt, the cashier, wanted to install a new vault. Bernal refused to okay the expense. So the company has ordered both Bernal and Nesbitt back to its main office at Chicago to report. The rumor is that they may fire Bernal as manager and give Nesbitt the job. A couple of the directors don't like Bernal, and this thing has given them their chance. They dug out a report Nesbitt had made showing the vault was a pushover. Bernal didn't act on that report." He sighed and then asked, "When's the trial, Perry?"

"The preliminary hearing is set for Friday morning. I'll see then what they've got against Corbin."

"They're laying for you up there," Paul Drake warned. "Better watch out, Perry. That district attorney has something up his sleeve, some sort of surprise that's going to knock you for a loop."

In spite of his long experience as a prosecutor, Vernon Flasher, the district attorney of Ivanhoe County, showed a certain nervousness at being called upon to oppose Perry Mason. There was, however, a secretive assurance underneath that nervousness.

Judge Haswell, realizing that the eyes of the community were upon him, adhered to legal technicalities to the point of being pompous both in rulings and mannerisms.

But what irritated Perry Mason was in the attitude of the spectators. He sensed that they did not regard him as an attorney trying to safeguard the interests of a client, but as a legal magician with a cloven hoof. The looting of the vault had shocked the community, and there was a tight-lipped determination that no legal tricks were going to do Mason any good *this* time.

Vernon Flasher didn't try to save his surprise evidence for a whirlwind finish. He used it right at the start of the case.

Frank Bernal, called as a witness, described the location of the vault, identified photographs, and then leaned back as the district attorney said abruptly, "You had reason to believe this vault was obsolete?"

"Yes, sir."

"It had been pointed out to you by one of your fellow employees, Mr. Ralph Nesbitt?"

"Yes, sir."

"And what did you do about it?"

"Are you," Mason asked in some surprise, "trying to cross-examine your own witness?"

"Just let him answer the question, and you'll see," Flasher replied grimly.

"Go right ahead and answer," Mason said to the witness.

Bernal assumed a more comfortable position. "I did three things," he said, "to safeguard the payrolls and to avoid the expense of tearing out the old vault and installing a new vault in its place."

"What were those three things?"

"I employed a special night watchman; I installed the best burglar alarm money could buy; and I made arrangements with the Ivanhoe National Bank, where we have our payrolls made up, to list the number of each twenty-dollar bill which was a part of each payroll."

Mason suddenly sat up straight.

Flasher gave him a glance of gloating triumph. "Do you wish the court to understand, Mr. Bernal," he said smugly, "that you have the numbers of the bills in the payroll which was made up for delivery on the fifteenth?"

"Yes, sir. Not *all* the bills, you understand. That would have taken too much time, but I have the numbers of all the twenty-dollar bills."

"And who recorded those numbers?" the prosecutor asked.

"The bank."

"And do you have that list of numbers with you?"

"I do. Yes, sir." Bernal produced a list. "I felt," he said, glancing coldly at Nesbitt, "that these precautions would be cheaper than a new vault."

"I move the list be introduced in evidence," Flasher said.

"Just a moment," Mason objected. "I have a couple of questions. You say this list is not in your handwriting, Mr. Bernal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Whose handwriting is it, do you know?" Mason asked.

"The assistant cashier of the Ivanhoe National Bank."

"Oh, all right," Flasher said. "We'll do it the hard way, if we have to. Stand down, Mr. Bernal, and I'll call the assistant cashier."

Harry Reedy, assistant cashier of the Ivanhoe Bank, had the mechanical assurance of an adding machine. He identified the list of numbers as being in his handwriting. He stated that he had listed the numbers of the twenty-dollar bills and put that list in an envelope which had been sealed and sent up with the money for the payroll.

"Cross-examine," Flasher said.

Mason studied the list. "These numbers are all in your handwriting?" he asked Reedy.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you yourself compare the numbers you wrote down with the numbers on the twenty-dollar bills?"

"No, sir. I didn't personally do that. Two assistants did that. One checked the numbers as they were read off, one as I wrote them down."

"The payrolls are for approximately a hundred thousand dollars, twice each month?"

"That's right. And ever since Mr. Bernal took charge, we have taken this means to identify payrolls. No

attempt is made to list the bills in numerical order. The serial numbers are simply read off and written down. Unless a robbery occurs, there is no need to do anything further. In the event of a robbery, we can reclassify the numbers and list the bills in numerical order."

"These numbers are in your handwriting — every number?"

"Yes, sir. More than that, you will notice that at the bottom of each page I have signed my initials."

"That's all," Mason said.

"I now offer once more to introduce this list in evidence," Flasher said.

"So ordered," Judge Haswell ruled.

"My next witness is Charles J. Oswald, the sheriff," the district attorney announced.

The sheriff, a long, lanky man with a quiet manner, took the stand. "You're acquainted with Harvey L. Corbin, the defendant in this case?" the district attorney asked.

"I am."

"Are you acquainted with his wife?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, on the morning of the fifteenth of this month, the morning of the robbery at the Jebson Commercial Company, did you have any conversation with Mrs. Corbin?"

"I did. Yes, sir."

"Did you ask her about her husband's activities the night before?"

"Just a moment," Mason said. "I object to this on the ground that any conversation the sheriff had with Mrs. Corbin is not admissible against the defendant, Corbin; furthermore, that in this state a wife cannot testify against her husband. Therefore, any statement she might make would be an indirect violation of that rule. Furthermore, I object on the ground that the question calls for hearsay."

Judge Haswell looked ponderously thoughtful, then said, "It seems to me Mr. Mason is correct."

"I'll put it this way, Mr. Sheriff," the district attorney said. "Did you, on the morning of the fifteenth, take any money from Mrs. Corbin?"

"Objected to as incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial," Mason said.

"Your Honor," Flasher said irritably, "that's the very gist of our case. We propose to show that two of the stolen twenty-dollar bills were in the possession of Mrs. Corbin."

Mason said, "Unless the prosecution can prove the bills were given Mrs. Corbin by her husband, the evidence is inadmissible."

"That's just the point," Flasher said. "Those bills *were* given to her by the defendant."

"How do you know?" Mason asked.

"She told the sheriff so."

"That's hearsay," Mason snapped.

Judge Haswell fidgeted on the bench. "It seems to me we're getting into a peculiar situation here. You can't call the wife as a witness, and I don't think her statement to the sheriff is admissible."

"Well," Flasher said desperately, "in this state, Your Honor, we have a

community-property law. Mrs. Corbin had this money. Since she is the wife of the defendant, it was community property. Therefore, it's partially his property."

"Well now, there," Judge Haswell said, "I think I can agree with you. You introduce the twenty-dollar bills. I'll overrule the objection made by the defense."

"Produce the twenty-dollar bills, Sheriff," Flasher said triumphantly.

The bills were produced and received in evidence.

"Cross-examine," Flasher said curtly.

"No questions of this witness," Mason said, "but I have a few questions to ask Mr. Bernal on cross-examination. You took him off the stand to lay the foundation for introducing the bank list, and I didn't have an opportunity to cross-examine him."

"I beg your pardon," Flasher said. "Resume the stand, Mr. Bernal."

His tone, now that he had the twenty-dollar bills safely introduced in evidence, had a gloating note to it.

Mason said, "This list which has been introduced in evidence is on the stationery of the Ivanhoe National Bank?"

"That's right. Yes, sir."

"It consists of several pages, and at the end there is the signature of the assistant cashier?"

"Yes, sir."

"And each page is initialed by the assistant cashier?"

"Yes, sir."

"This was the scheme which you thought of in order to safeguard the company against a payroll robbery?"

"Not to safeguard the company against a payroll robbery, Mr. Mason, but to assist us in recovering the money in the event there was a holdup."

"This was your plan to answer Mr. Nesbitt's objections that the vault was an outmoded model?"

"A part of my plan, yes. I may say that Mr. Nesbitt's objections had never been voiced until I took office. I felt he was trying to embarrass me by making my administration show less net returns than expected." Bernal tightened his lips and added, "Mr. Nesbitt had, I believe, been expecting to be appointed manager. He was disappointed. I believe he still expects to be manager."

In the spectators' section of the courtroom, Ralph Nesbitt glared at Bernal.

"You had a conversation with the defendant on the night of the fourteenth?" Mason asked Bernal.

"I did. Yes, sir."

"You told him that for reasons which you deemed sufficient you were discharging him immediately and wanted him to leave the premises at once?"

"Yes, sir. I did."

"And you paid him his wages in cash?"

"Mr. Nesbitt paid him in my presence, with money he took from the petty-cash drawer of the vault."

"Now, as part of the wages due him, wasn't Corbin given these two

twenty-dollar bills which have been introduced in evidence?"

Bernal shook his head. "I had thought of that," he said, "but it would have been impossible. Those bills weren't available to us at that time. The payroll is received from the bank in a sealed package. Those two twenty-dollar bills were in that package."

"And the list of the numbers of the twenty-dollar bills?"

"That's in a sealed envelope. The money is placed in the vault. I lock the list of numbers in my desk."

"Are you prepared to swear that neither you nor Mr. Nesbitt had access to these two twenty-dollar bills on the night of the fourteenth?"

"That is correct."

"That's all," Mason said. "No further cross-examination."

"I now call Ralph Nesbitt to the stand," District Attorney Flasher said. "I want to fix the time of these events definitely, Your Honor."

"Very well," Judge Haswell said. "Mr. Nesbitt, come forward."

Ralph Nesbitt, after answering the usual preliminary questions, sat down in the witness chair.

"Were you present at a conversation which took place between the defendant, Harvey L. Corbin, and Frank Bernal on the fourteenth of this month?" the district attorney asked.

"I was. Yes, sir."

"What time did that conversation take place?"

"About 8 o'clock in the evening."

"And, without going into the details of that conversation, I will ask you if the general effect of it was that the defendant was discharged and ordered to leave the company's property?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he was paid the money that was due him?"

"In cash. Yes, sir. I took the cash from the safe myself."

"Where was the payroll then?"

"In the sealed package in a compartment in the safe. As cashier, I had the only key to that compartment. Earlier in the afternoon I had gone to Ivanhoe City and received the sealed package of money and the envelope containing the list of numbers. I personally locked the package of money in the vault."

"And the list of numbers?"

"Mr. Bernal locked that in his desk."

"Cross-examine," Flasher said.

"No questions," Mason said.

"That's our case, Your Honor," Flasher observed.

"May we have a few minutes indulgence?" Mason asked Judge Haswell.

"Very well. Make it brief," the judge agreed.

Mason turned to Paul Drake and Della Street. "Well, there you are," Drake said. "You're confronted with the proof, Perry."

"Are you going to put the defendant on the stand?" Della Street asked.

Mason shook his head. "It would be suicidal. He has a record of a prior criminal conviction. Also, it's a rule

of law that if one asks about any part of a conversation on direct examination, the other side can bring out all the conversation. That conversation, when Corbin was discharged, was to the effect that he had lied about his past record. And I guess there's no question that he did."

"And he's lying now," Drake said. "This is one case where you're licked. I think you'd better cop a plea, and see what kind of a deal you can make with Flasher."

"Probably not any," Mason said. "Flasher wants to have the reputation of having given me a licking — wait a minute, Paul. I have an idea."

Mason turned abruptly, walked away to where he could stand by himself, his back to the crowded courtroom.

"Are you ready?" the judge asked.

Mason turned. "I am quite ready, Your Honor. I have one witness whom I wish to put on the stand. I wish a subpoena *duces tecum* issued for that witness. I want him to bring certain documents which are in his possession."

"Who is the witness, and what are the documents?" the judged asked.

Mason walked quickly over to Paul Drake. "What's the name of that character who has the garbage-collecting business," he said softly, "the one who has the first nickel he'd ever made?"

"George Addey."

The lawyer turned to the judge. "The witness that I want is George Addey, and the documents that I want him to bring to court with him are all the twenty-dollar bills that he has received during the past sixty days."

"Your Honor," Flasher protested, "this is an outrage. This is making a travesty out of justice. It is exposing the court to ridicule."

Mason said, "I give Your Honor my assurance that I think this witness is material, and that the documents are material. I will make an affidavit to that effect if necessary. As attorney for the defendant, may I point out that if the court refuses to grant this subpoena, it will be denying the defendant due process of law."

"I'm going to issue the subpoena," Judge Haswell said, testily, "and for your own good, Mr. Mason, the testimony had better be relevant."

George Addey, unshaven and bristling with indignation, held up his right hand to be sworn. He glared at Perry Mason.

"Mr. Addey," Mason said, "you have the contract to collect garbage from Jebson City?"

"I do."

"How long have you been collecting garbage there?"

"For over five years, and I want to tell you —"

Judge Haswell banged his gavel. "The witness will answer questions and not interpolate any comments."

"I'll interpolate anything I dang please," Addey said.

"That'll do," the judge said. "Do you wish to be jailed for contempt of court, Mr. Addey?"

"I don't want to go to jail, but I —"

"Then you'll remember the respect that is due the court," the judge said. "Now you sit there and answer questions. This is a court of law. You're in this court as a citizen, and I'm here as a judge, and I propose to see that the respect due to the court is enforced." There was a moment's silence while the judge glared angrily at the witness. "All right, go ahead, Mr. Mason," Judge Haswell said.

Mason said, "During the thirty days prior to the fifteenth of this month, did you deposit any money in any banking institution?"

"I did not."

"Do you have with you all the twenty-dollar bills that you received during the last sixty days?"

"I have, and I think making me bring them here is just like inviting some crook to come and rob me and—"

Judge Haswell banged with his gavel. "Any more comments of that sort from the witness and there will be a sentence imposed for contempt of court. Now you get out those twenty-dollar bills, Mr. Addey, and put them right up here on the clerk's desk."

Addey, mumbling under his breath, slammed a roll of twenty-dollar bills down on the desk in front of the clerk.

"Now," Mason said, "I'm going to need a little clerical assistance. I would like to have my secretary, Miss Street, and the clerk help me check through the numbers on these bills. I will select a few at random."

Mason picked up three of the twenty-dollar bills and said, "I am going to ask my assistants to check the list of numbers introduced in evidence. In my hand is a twenty-dollar bill that has the number L 07083274 A. Is that bill on the list? The next bill that I pick up is number L 07579190 A. Are any of those bills on the list?"

The courtroom was silent. Suddenly, Della Street said, "Yes, here's one that's on the list — bill number L 07579190 A. It's on the list, on page eight."

"What?" the prosecutor shouted.

"Exactly," Mason said, smiling. "So, if a case is to be made against a person merely because he has possession of the money that was stolen on the fifteenth of this month, then your office should prefer charges against this witness, George Addey, Mr. District Attorney."

Addey jumped from the witness stand and shook his fist in Mason's face. "You're a cockeyed liar!" he screamed. "There ain't a one of those bills but what I didn't have it before the fifteenth. The company cashier changes my money into twenties, because I like big bills. I bury 'em in cans, and I put the date on the side of the can."

"Here's the list," Mason said. "Check it for yourself."

A tense silence gripped the courtroom as the judge and the spectators waited.

"I'm afraid I don't understand this, Mr. Mason," Judge Haswell said, after a moment.

"I think it's quite simple," Mason said. "And I now suggest the court take a recess for an hour and check these other bills against this list. I think the district attorney may be surprised."

And Mason sat down and proceeded to put papers in his brief case.

Della Street, Paul Drake, and Perry Mason were sitting in the lobby of the Ivanhoe Hotel.

"When are you going to tell us?" Della Street asked fiercely. "Or do we tear you limb from limb? How could the garbage man have — ?"

"Wait a minute," Mason said. "I think we're about to get results. Here comes the esteemed district attorney, Vernon Flasher, and he's accompanied by Judge Haswell."

The two strode over to Mason's group and bowed with cold formality.

Mason got up.

Judge Haswell began in his best courtroom voice. "A most deplorable situation has occurred. It seems that Mr. Frank Bernal has — well —"

"Been detained somewhere," Vernon Flasher said.

"Disappeared," Judge Haswell said. "He's gone."

"I expected as much," Mason said.

"Now will you kindly tell me just what sort of pressure you brought to bear on Mr. Bernal to — ?"

"Just a moment, Judge," Mason said. "The only pressure I brought to bear on him was to cross-examine him."

"Did you know that there had been a mistake in the dates on those lists?"

"There was no mistake. When you find Bernal, I'm sure you will discover there was a deliberate falsification. He was short in his accounts, and he knew he was about to be demoted. He had a desperate need for a hundred thousand dollars in ready cash. He had evidently been planning this burglary, or, rather, this embezzlement, for some time. He learned that Corbin had a criminal record. He arranged to have these lists furnished by the bank. He installed a burglar alarm, and, naturally, knew how to circumvent it. He employed a watchman he knew was addicted to drink. He only needed to stage his coup at the right time. He fired Corbin and paid him off with bills that had been recorded by the bank on page eight of the list of bills *in the payroll on the first of the month.*

"Then he removed page eight from the list of bills contained in the payroll *of the fifteenth*, before he showed it to the police, and substituted page eight of the list for the *first of the month* payroll. It was that simple.

"Then he drugged the watchman's whiskey, took an acetylene torch, burned through the vault doors, and took all the money."

"May I ask how you knew all this?" Judge Haswell demanded.

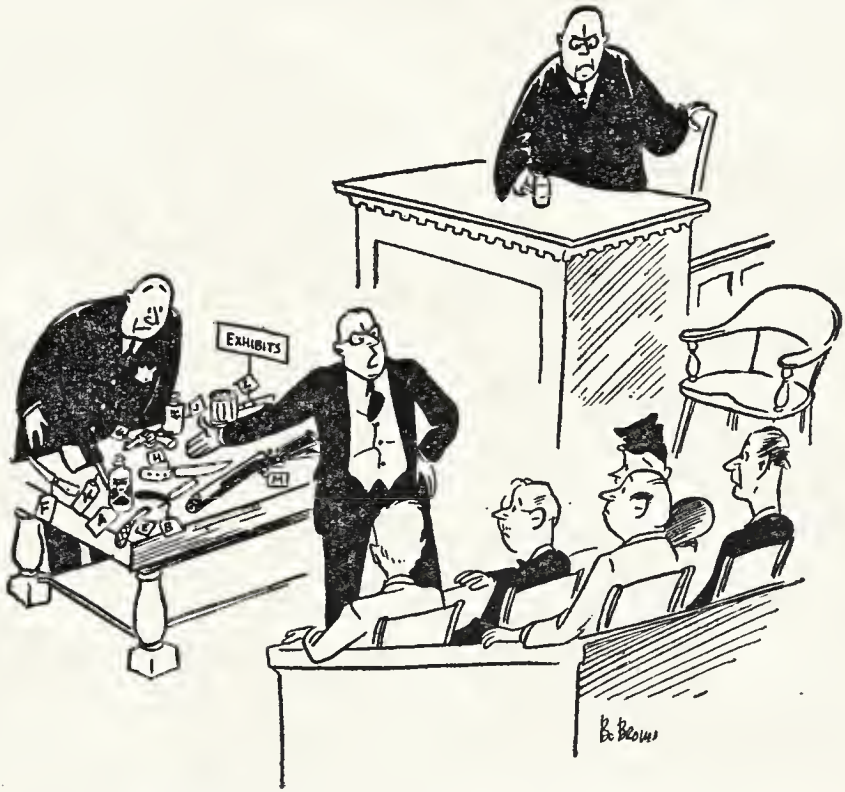
"Certainly," Mason said. "My client told me he received those bills from Nesbitt, who took them from the petty-cash drawer in the safe. He also told the sheriff that. I happened to be the only one who believed him. It sometimes pays, Your Honor, to

have faith in a man, even if he has made a previous mistake. Assuming my client was innocent, I knew either Bernal or Nesbitt must be guilty. I then realized that only Bernal had custody of the *previous* lists of numbers.

"As an employee, Bernal had been paid on the first of the month. He looked at the numbers on the twenty-dollar bills in his pay envelope and found that they had been listed on page eight of the payroll for the first.

"Bernal only needed to abstract all twenty-dollar bills from the petty-cash drawer, substitute twenty-dollar bills from his own pay envelope, call in Corbin, and fire him. His trap was set.

"I let him know I knew what had been done by bringing Addey into court and proving my point. Then I asked for a recess. That was so Bernal would have a chance to skip out. You see, flight may be received as evidence of guilt. It was a professional courtesy to the district attorney. It will help him when Bernal is arrested."



"COME, COME, NOW . . . WHO HAD EXHIBIT C LAST?"

REPORT TO READERS

Six months ago we asked our readers to tell us their preference between two editorial policies: all new stories, no reprints; or a continuation of the policy EQMM has followed since its inception more than twelve years ago — half the stories new (the very best we can find, by the best writers) and the other half reprints (most of them, as you know, relatively unknown and many of them literary discoveries). The response from readers has been truly remarkable, and we wish to thank you most sincerely for your deep interest and for the trouble you have all taken to make your wishes known to us. Your expressions of opinion have proved to be a mandate. By a vote of 8 to 1 — so one-sided that there can be no possible doubt as to the preference of the overwhelming majority — you have asked us to continue our original policy of what some of you described as a "mixed diet" — half new and half old. So we will go right on packing each and every issue of EQMM with the widest possible diversity of detection and the widest possible variety of villainy — half the stories freshly minted and the other half a discriminating selection of rare criminological coins.

We continue this issue with the kind of "old" story we have presented so often in the past — a tale so comparatively unknown that to most readers (if not actually to all) it will be virtually new — a detective story in the purest tradition and by a famous literary figure not usually associated with crime fiction. Remember that brilliant reprint we published in our December 1952 issue? — "Author in Search of a Character" by Phyllis Bentley, one of England's foremost regional novelists. Remember, too, that we had every reason to believe that this was the only story Phyllis Bentley had written about Miss Marian Phipps, spinster-sleuth? And then the author surprised us by (1) writing a brand-new Miss Phipps story for last year's contest — see "Chain of Witnesses" published two months ago; and (2) informing us there were other stories about Miss Phipps — no less than five of them!

Here is the first of those earlier adventures in crime, detection, and mystery. Miss Bentley's original conception was a plump, pink-cheeked spinster-novelist with untidy white hair and wearing an old-fashioned pince-nez who meets a Scotland Yard man and listens to the facts in a mystery. Whether the meeting takes place on a train or in a tea shop or in Miss Phipps' own home, the little spinster-novelist turns out to be that grand old favorite of fiction, the armchair detective. It must have been

Miss Bentley's intention never to have Miss Phipps rise from her chair, never visit the scene of the crime, never cross-examine the witnesses, yet always come up with the one and only solution to the problem. In a phrase, the female counterpart of Baroness Orczy's The Old Man in the Corner or M. P. Shiel's Prince Zaleski.

Miss Bentley stuck to her plan just about as closely as M. P. Shiel and Baroness Orczy did before her. For you will remember that Prince Zaleski finally left his fin-de-siècle apartment to do unavoidable leg work, and The Old Man in the Corner similarly illustrated that the exception proves the rule when he became a peripatetic private eye in at least one of his cases. With the best intentions in the world, armchair detectives just can't keep on sitting it out. In "Chain of Witnesses," Miss Phipps got up from the breakfast table one morning and did considerable gumshoe gallivanting; but in this earlier tale you will again meet the original spinster-sleuth who solved her investigations from a strictly sedentary position — helped only by a spot of tea.

THE TUESDAY AND FRIDAY THEFTS

by PHYLLIS BENTLEY

"Detective-Inspector Tarrant, madam," said the maid.

"Isn't that a different title from the one you held when we first met?" said Miss Phipps, rising and offering her plump little hand to the large young man coming towards her. "Surely it used to be detective-sergeant?"

The young man colored. "Yes — I've had promotion since I saw you," he said. "I might say, because I saw you; for it was that string and siphon case which earned it. But fancy you remembering my rank, Miss Phipps! What a mind you have for detail!"

It was now the novelist's turn to color; she smirked, fidgeted with the chain of her old-fashioned pince-nez, and ran a hand self-consciously over her untidy mop of white hair.

"It's just my job," she murmured modestly. "How do you like your tea? Cream and sugar?"

Tarrant nodded.

"And how's the new book going?" asked Tarrant presently.

"Finished!" cried Miss Phipps triumphantly. "I've just sent it off to the typist."

"That's splendid," said Tarrant heartily. "I'm specially glad because I was hoping you might have time to assist me with another little problem."

"Really!" said Miss Phipps, flattered. "And what is the locale this time?"

"Brittlesea again," replied Tarrant gloomily.

"You seem to have a good deal of crime in Brittlesea," said Miss Phipps in a disapproving tone.

Tarrant sighed. "These seaside resorts!" he grumbled. "Large floating population; away from home; responsibilities forgotten; lot of people you'll never see again; out to enjoy; in a word, everyone on the loose. Bound to cause trouble. But this time it's amongst the residents; at least, we think so. It's at Quanders'."

"Quanders?" said Miss Phipps, perplexed.

"Yes. Quanders and Quanders," said Tarrant. "They sell everything for ladies — at a price. Hats, gowns, shoes, gloves, lingerie, ornaments. Very smart, very expensive. Five floors. Café. Mixed orchestra of seven. Mannequins. And that's where the trouble lies — at least, we think so."

"Not a murder, I hope?" said Miss Phipps, her pink face serious.

"No. Theft," said Tarrant.

"Dear me!" said Miss Phipps distastefully.

"Regular and continued thefts," said Tarrant. "Every Tuesday and Friday for the last six weeks."

"But, my dear boy," said Miss Phipps in a brighter tone, "how very odd! Tuesdays and Fridays! Why is that, do you suppose?"

"I wish I knew," said Tarrant even more gloomily. "The circumstances are odder still; I'm sure you'll think so when I tell them to you."

"I'm longing to know them," said Miss Phipps, wriggling with excitement. "Tell me all."

Tarrant put down his tea cup and cleared his throat.

"Messrs. Quanders," he said, "at present employ two mannequins, both of whom have been in their employ for several years. The senior of these, named Lillian Crofts, is leaving at the end of the season, in September, to be married. There has never been any trouble of this kind with her before; in fact, by all accounts she's an exceptionally nice girl, very quiet and refined and courteous, not at all the usual idea of a mannequin."

"Not *your* idea of a mannequin, you mean," said Miss Phipps. "I suppose she's a blonde?"

"Why should you suppose so?" said Tarrant crossly.

"My dear boy," said Miss Phipps in a soothing tone, "you have a predilection for blondes — I've noticed it before. Tell me more about the beautiful Miss Crofts. I suppose she is beautiful?"

"Oh, very," said Tarrant. "Both mannequins are. Both blondes, both naturally curly hair, both tall and slender. Lillian Crofts and Doris Nelson. If anything, Lillian is slightly taller and slightly more slender, and her hair is slightly paler, and her face is slightly less made up and she's slightly less vivacious."

"Your powers of observation have

improved," said Miss Phipps, warmly. "Definitely improved. Doris is pink and gold, and Lillian ivory and platinum. Continue."

"They're both distantly related to the directors," said Tarrant.

Miss Phipps made a *moue*. "The plot thickens," she said.

"It does indeed," agreed Tarrant. "That's what makes it so awkward, you see. Naturally Quanders are anxious to avoid scandal, and in view of Lillian's excellent reputation and approaching marriage, they're particularly anxious not to have any accusations thrown about until they're pretty well proved. Besides, imagine two directors with relatives under suspicion! Accordingly, the girls haven't been allowed to know they're suspected, or even that there is any theft under investigation. The whole thing has been kept quiet."

"*Sub rosa*," said Miss Phipps.

"Besides," continued Tarrant, "everyone who knows Lillian is convinced she's as honest as the day. They all like her very much indeed."

"What about Doris?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"Doris isn't under suspicion," said Tarrant. "The clothes which disappear are always those which Lillian has been wearing. That looks bad, because Doris's duties are just the same as Lillian's."

"What *are* the duties of a mannequin?" demanded Miss Phipps. "I've always wondered."

Tarrant drew out his notebook and turned the pages. "In the morning and early afternoons," he said, "the girls first try on new dresses which have just arrived, to show the saleswomen what types of dresses they are and for what customers they are likely to be suitable, and next try on dresses tentatively approved by customers. They try on, say, six dresses; from these the customer chooses two or three to try on herself."

"A very succinct account," approved Miss Phipps. "But what an occupation for a woman with a brain!"

"However, that part of their work doesn't really concern us," continued Tarrant. "During the lunch hour and the tea hour, Lillian puts on some particularly attractive outfit, and parades in the restaurants. There are two of these, on the same floor, with the service kitchen between. They are connected, so far as the public is concerned, by a wide corridor, in which the orchestra is located, on a platform. When Lillian has paraded in both restaurants, she returns downstairs to the gown department, and puts on another outfit."

"Outfit?" queried Miss Phipps.

"Yes, outfit," replied Tarrant. "Not only a dress; sometimes a hat, sometimes shoes, almost always ornaments. Beads or bracelets or clips, you know."

"You're certainly well up in the technical terms," said Miss Phipps approvingly.

"I've haunted that shop till I've nearly turned into a mannequin my-

self," said the detective with disgust. "I'm supposed to be designing a new decorative scheme for the interior of the shop; that gives me plenty of opportunity to stand about and make notes, pretending to take measurements. But to return to the girl's duties. When Lillian goes downstairs, Doris goes upstairs; she then parades both restaurants, and returns to the gown department as before. By that time Lillian has put on another dress, and is off again. And so on."

"Do they share a dressing room?" inquired Miss Phipps.

"They do indeed," replied the detective emphatically. "If you saw the fuss that goes on there in the afternoon, with a score of customers waiting to try on dresses, and only eight dressing rooms to put them in, you wouldn't need to ask such a question. It's a dog's life, in my opinion, being a saleswoman in a luxury shop. All the customers want the same saleswoman and the same fitter, and they all come at the same time — or seem to; and the saleswomen run about knocking on the dressing-room doors to hurry them out, and get snapped at. Oh, it's a dog's life!"

"Your description conveys," said Miss Phipps thoughtfully, "a scene of busy confusion, offering considerable opportunity for unperceived irregularities."

"That's right," agreed Tarrant. "At lunch time, you understand, it's quiet everywhere except in the restaurants; but during the tea hour, from 3:45 to 5:30, the whole place is in a turmoil. And it's the dresses worn in the tea hour which have vanished."

"The dresses only, or the ornaments as well?" asked Miss Phipps.

"The whole outfit, just as worn," replied the detective. "Except the shoes."

"Except the shoes. How are these outfits chosen?" inquired Miss Phipps thoughtfully.

"Partly by the head of the gown department, partly by the girls themselves," explained the detective. "The head, in conjunction with the girls, selects a few attractive dresses each day, if and when she has time, and they are hung up in the dressing room. Then as each dress is put on, the girl concerned goes to the artificial jewelery counter and picks accessories to go with it. They pride themselves on their taste, you know. If she needs special shoes — sports shoes, for instance — she usually goes to the shoe department before putting on the dress."

"But the shoes," said Miss Phipps, "haven't vanished."

"No. But they don't always change their shoes," said the detective. "I understand the same pair often does for different outfits."

"Tell me how the thefts were discovered," urged Miss Phipps.

"It was quite a long time before the losses were found out at all," replied the detective, "and a still longer time before they were definitely consid-

ered thefts. You see, saleswomen often pop into the mannequins' dressing room and remove one of the gowns hanging there, to show to a customer. After all, that's the purpose of mannequins, I understand, to create interest in the clothes they wear. Often there are inquiries for what Lillian has just been wearing in the restaurants. If a saleswoman went to the dressing room and found that gown not there, she would simply imagine that someone else was showing it. Then at the end of the day the dresses are put away rapidly by apprentices in the show cases."

"But, my dear boy!" exclaimed Miss Phipps distressfully. "The only thing that prevents that firm losing thousands of pounds in dresses every year is just the essential decency of human nature."

"Not altogether," objected Tarrant. "There is a commissionaire at each of the five entrances, shrewd fellows all. The staff all leave by the staff door, they clock in and clock out, and have to show a chit from the head of their department to the doorkeeper before they can take any parcel out with them. What puzzles me," and he shook his head over it, "is why the thefts always occur on Tuesdays and Fridays."

"Why, indeed!" said Miss Phipps, perplexed. There was a pause. "How was the Tuesday and Friday detail discovered?" she asked then, her pink face furrowed.

"The thefts first came out during a row about a particularly handsome evening dress in primrose satin, a Paris model," said the detective. "You can imagine it all for yourself; first, one saleswoman asked for the primrose dress, then another; then there was a hunt for it all over the department; then the loss was confessed to the head, and there was another search, and a check on the 'on approval' entries and so on; and of course the question was presently asked: When was the dress last seen? And Lillian replied that she had worn it on Tuesday. Then a thorough check was given to the whole stock, and several other things were found to be missing; and Lillian had worn them all last Tuesday or the previous Friday. Meanwhile the ornament counter grew excited, and reported that two brilliant clips and a carved wood bracelet were missing. Lillian wore the clips on Tuesday, the bracelet on Friday. And on the next Wednesday morning two complete sports outfits worn by Lillian the previous day were missing, and the next Saturday morning one evening dress and a collarette of green stones, worn by Lillian the preceding day, were missing. These discoveries were kept quiet, told to the seniors in the department only, because the matter was now growing so serious that I was called in. I suggested that both mannequins be asked to make a list each day of what they wear, and they began to do so. And since then, each week, the things Lillian has worn on Tuesdays and Fridays are always missing."

"Never anything that Doris wears?"

"Never."

"I don't like it, I don't like it at all," said Miss Phipps, shaking her head. "Very nasty — in fact, really horrible. Tell me, are the stolen gowns those worn at the end or at the beginning of the afternoon session?"

"It's strange you should hit on that," said Tarrant, "for that's another odd feature of the case. They are always ones she has worn early in the session."

"Very sad," said Miss Phipps. "You told me, I believe, that Lillian is shortly leaving to be married?"

"That's right. She's engaged to a young man in the sports department — he's in charge of the tennis racquets and golf clubs and so on. A very nice young fellow with no nonsense about him," said Tarrant approvingly.

"And Doris, is she engaged to be married?" inquired Miss Phipps.

Her tone implied that she expected a negative answer, and Tarrant enjoyed replying emphatically, "Oh, yes! She's engaged to a member of the café orchestra, a lad named Robbins."

Miss Phipps was as disconcerted as he could have wished. "Really?" she said. "Are you sure? I must say that surprises me."

"It isn't a formal engagement — she doesn't wear a ring," explained Tarrant. "As a matter of fact, I hear her family don't altogether approve. The director, you know. But she and Robbins certainly have an understanding."

"I cannot imagine," said Miss Phipps distastefully, "what young girls see in these crooners. All bleat and no chin."

"That isn't a bad description of Robbins," said Tarrant, smiling, "but he isn't a crooner, he plays the 'cello."

Miss Phipps smoothed her untidy white hair. Then she said: "I seem to remember you implied that Doris was decidedly vivacious. Isn't the position of fiancé to Doris apt to be temporary? Hasn't she been interested in other young men?"

"Oh, yes, often," agreed Tarrant. "She's pretty and very lively."

Miss Phipps nodded, as if to herself. "The real difficulty in this case," she said, "is not the identity of the culprit. That seems fairly obvious."

"Does it?" said Tarrant. "I suppose it does, but I'm very sorry to hear you say so. She's such a nice girl — seems really good, you know."

Miss Phipps gave him a curious look. "The real problem is not the identity of the culprit," she repeated. "Now, tell me, what factors have Tuesday and Friday in common, at Messrs. Quanders and Quanders?"

"None," said Tarrant.

Miss Phipps looked at him reproachfully. "Don't be childish, my dear boy," she said. "Of course they have — they must have! Perhaps Tuesday is the early closing day in Brittlesea?"

"No, Wednesday. But Quanders

don't close on the town's regular early closing day," said Tarrant, a bit irritably. "They're too superior. They close on Saturday afternoons."

"Then there you are!" said Miss Phipps, triumphant. "Tuesday is the day before Wednesday, the town's early closing day; Friday is the day before Saturday, which is Messrs. Quanders' early closing day."

Tarrant looked surprised. "And what do you deduce from that?" he asked.

"Nothing as yet," replied Miss Phipps. "But plainly there's a connection. Do the mannequins have time off on Wednesday as well as on Saturday?"

"No, they don't," said Tarrant crossly. "It's a very natural suggestion," he added in a moment, repenting his bad temper, "because on Wednesday the shop is very quiet. But they don't; they exhibit to customers and parade the restaurants just the same. Or rather, not quite the same, for only one of the restaurants is open on Wednesday after 12."

"There you are!" exclaimed Miss Phipps. "There's your clue. You must do the rest for yourself on the spot. I really cannot undertake," she added fretfully, "to complete the whole case for you. The psychology is clear now — you can work out the mere mechanics of the plot yourself."

"Miss Phipps, I beg you not to give up now!" cried Tarrant. "I'm still quite in the dark about it."

"You must just go back and watch her," said Miss Phipps impatiently.

"I *have* watched her!" said the exasperated Tarrant. "But it's such a job! There are two of them to watch, you know, and they seem to be all over the place at once."

"Ubiquitous," suggested Miss Phipps.

"Very likely," agreed Tarrant. "It's a very difficult place to watch a girl in without giving the whole show away. We're bound to keep a certain distance and try to look casual — imagine the effect of a rumor that the mannequins at Quanders' are being watched! And there are the lifts and the stairs, and the jewelery counter and the dressing room; there are both restaurants and the corridor between; there's the sports department —"

"What has the sports departments to do with it?" demanded Miss Phipps sharply.

"Well, Lillian sometimes goes round that way on her way up to the restaurants," explained Tarrant.

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Phipps. "She does nothing of the kind!"

"I tell you she does!" insisted Tarrant. "She often just passes by the entrance, to give her young man a chance of seeing her all dressed up."

"Nonsense!" repeated Miss Phipps firmly. "A girl such as you have described Lillian to be — quiet, refined, courteous — would never do anything so vulgar."

"But I *saw* her," said Tarrant. "I've seen her there several times."

"On Tuesday and Friday afternoons?" asked Miss Phipps quickly.

Tarrant gaped, then rapidly flicked the pages of his notebook. "Yes," he finally admitted.

"And in a dress which was later missing?"

"Yes," said Tarrant in a perplexed tone. "Yes, that's right. Last Friday she tripped as she came up the stairs, and I noticed the frills on the hem of the skirt."

"Well, there you are!" said Miss Phipps triumphantly. "Of course it was Doris."

"Doris!"

"Surely you knew that? My dear boy," Miss Phipps lectured him as she saw his incredulous look, "when you told me the stolen outfits were always Lillian's, I suspected Doris at once. Nobody would be so foolish as always to steal the dresses worn by themselves, when others hung in the same room; and how could any other saleswoman distinguish with such unfailing accuracy those worn by the two girls? No! They were stolen by somebody who knew for certain that the blame would fall on Lillian. Clearly spite was indicated as a secondary motive, and the preference of the young man in the sports department probably has something to do with it. But I hadn't the least idea how Doris smuggled the clothes out of the shop, though the omission of the shoes seemed a significant detail. Now, however, some light appears. There is no definite timetable for the girls' parades; they parade and dress in turn, but that is all. Now Doris hurries over her round, parading, perhaps, in only one restaurant. She hurries downstairs, puts on the dress and ornaments which Lillian has just discarded, and goes upstairs again, passing the sports department on the way. Anyone seeing her in the distance would take her for another glimpse of Lillian, whom they saw in that dress a few moments ago. When Lillian is questioned, of course she admits having worn the dress. But why does Doris go by way of the sports department? It seems rather a dangerous thing to do! So there must be a strong reason for it. And there must lie the clue to the mystery."

"I suppose she tripped because the dress was too long for her," mused Tarrant, glad to be convinced, "and never wore the shoes because they were too large for her — Lillian is, as I told you, the taller of the two."

"Tell me," said Miss Phipps suddenly. "Is the sports department anywhere near the orchestra?"

"Yes. Some steps and an archway lead from one to the other, past the musicians' cloak-room," said Tarrant.

"What do the musicians keep in their cloak-room?" demanded Miss Phipps.

"Oh, hats, coats, piles of music, instrument cases," replied Tarrant.

"Tell me," said Miss Phipps, again sharply. "Didn't you say the shop was very quiet on Wednesday after-

noons? Does that, by any chance" — Miss Phipps panted excitedly — "mean that there's no music then?"

"Yes."

"Then the musicians probably take their instruments home the previous night?"

"That's right!" cried Tarrant, slapping his knee. "You've got it! On Wednesday afternoons there is no music because there aren't enough customers to make it worthwhile; on Saturday afternoons there is no music because the shop closes at 12. And I remember now! — the orchestra plays in a café on the pier, for dancing, on Wednesday and Saturday nights. So the members must take their instruments home the nights before."

"And on Tuesdays and Fridays, Doris leaves the dresses in the musicians' cloak-room."

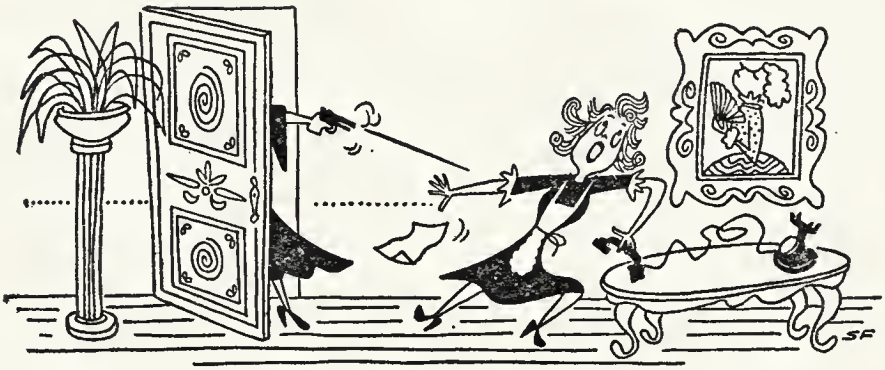
"And Robbins takes them home in his 'cello case."

"Exactly," said Miss Phipps, giggling with excitement. "But for my part, I wish he were a crooner."

Tarrant looked his question.

"It was a nasty, spiteful trick to make Lillian appear to be the thief," said Miss Phipps, her round cheeks even pinker than usual. "And the girl who played such a trick deserves to be married to a crooner," she added forcefully.

Tarrant snorted. "You don't know your crooners — they are paid too well to need to steal," he concluded grimly.



QUEEN'S QUARTET

To the best of our recollection, the youngest writer to make his debut in EQMM was, until now, James Yaffe. Jimmy was only fifteen years old and in his third year in high school when we published his first story. It appeared in our July 1943 issue. Since then James Yaffe has made giant strides, and he is still only at the beginning of his career. His first volume of short stories, POOR COUSIN EVELYN, *was published in 1951, his first novel,* THE GOOD-FOR-NOTHING *in 1953, and later this year his second novel — a tremendous advance over all his previous work — will be published, as were his other books, by Little, Brown.*

Now the eleven-year-old record for "youngest writer" is broken. In this issue we bring you four "first stories" by children — two written by boys when they were twelve years old, one by a girl when she was eight and a half, and the fourth (and this may be not only a new record for EQMM but for all magazines) by a boy in his second grade at elementary school, written when he was not yet six years old!

This is indeed "The Children's Hour," and a little child shall lead them, and out of the mouths of babes . . .

We begin with "On the Very Street You Live" by Fred Charap of Brooklyn — and the best way we can tell you about the author is to quote verbatim (with only a few changes in spelling and punctuation) from the youngster's own letters. He first wrote:

> *Dear Sirs,*
>
> *I am 12 years old and ever since I remember I have been a habit fan of yours. I have observed in your Magazine that you are interested in young writers, and I say with all modesty that I deserve that title more than almost anybody else. I am not sending a story with this letter because I'm afraid you'll tear it up as soon as you read the story. So please answer this letter saying if you want me or don't want me to send you the story . . .*

We replied at once, asking for young Mr. Charap's story and promising not to tear it up. The story reached us by return mail, with a very short note from the author which read (and we don't think we shall ever forget it):

> *Thank you very much for the letter you sent me. Every time I*

read it I get a wonderful feeling and I always will. Even if my story doesn't get published, I'll remember this as long as I live.

Well, we read Fred Charap's story, and we promptly bought it. The young author wrote us again, expressing his happiness and telling us more about himself — and again we quote verbatim because we couldn't possibly improve on the author's own words:

> *I live in a middle class Brooklyn neighborhood. My father is a carpenter and my mother is a housewife. My brother Stanley is in his last year at college and is majoring in Math and Physics. Ever since I can remember I loved books and my favorite writers are Ernest Hemingway, Agatha Christie, Ellery Queen, John Steinbeck, and Edgar Allan Poe. Hemingway is my favorite. . . . I wrote "On the Very Street You Live" because I had to. Someone has to tell people what's happening to the youth of the nation. Adults don't realize or don't want to realize that every day the kids of the country get closer to being gangsters and only you and everyone who has a stake in the United States can do anything about it. My literary ambitions are to use writing as a form of bettering the community.*

Now read Fred Charap's study in juvenile delinquency, with a power that is quite remarkable stemming from a twelve-year-old, and ask yourself if a much older writer could have presented a sharper picture, or pointed a sharper moral, or taught a sharper lesson, and all with such sharp economy . . .

ON THE VERY STREET YOU LIVE

by FRED CHARAP

THIS COULD HAPPEN IN YOUR town. In your community. On the very street you live. Your own child might be in this story — for this could happen to anybody in the seventh grade of any school in any place in the entire United States.

Let's take three boys — Jack, Bill, and Mike. The story starts in an average classroom. The 12 o'clock bell rings and the children run for their clothes and everyone runs out of the room except four or five kids — among them Jack, Bill, and Mike.

"Where's the chalk?" yelled someone.

"In this closet," answered Jack, pointing his finger.

Suddenly Mike, who was acting as lookout, came running into the room, yelling, "Teacher's comin'."

They looked at each other, then darted out of the room down the stairs and out into the street — like they were shot out of a cannon.

Jack wiped his brow and said, still panting, "Wow, that was a close one. Oh, by the way, come over to my house after lunch — my mother's workin', and I got cigs."

"Good," said Mike. "Hey, what's the matter, Bill, you act like you was dead?"

Bill, who was half the size of Mike — which is about as tall as a full-grown pygmy — said with bitterness in his voice, "It's my damn brother. I stole a pack of paper, so he uses up all the paper, then goes and tells my mother I stole it. How do you like that!"

After a few more remarks they separated and went home to eat.

It was 12:30 now. Mike walked down the long hallway to Jack's apartment, thinking. "Why do I get a strange feelin' when I do somethin' like this? It's not that I don't like smokin'."

He came to Jack's door and hesitated. He wanted to run but he couldn't. They would call him chicken if he did.

Mike opened the door and went in to find Bill and Jack listening to some music on the radio and taking long drags on their cigarettes. Bill looked up from a stamp album which was on his lap and said, "The cigs are on top of the TV — so is the lighter." Then his eyes almost popped out of his head and he yelled, "Don't you got any brains, you stupid jerk? Leaving the door so all the gossips can hear us! Then we're done for."

Mike made a fist and shouted back, "Well, your yelling at the top of your lungs isn't helpin' any."

"Would you please go shut the door," whispered Bill through his teeth. Even though Bill was much shorter and fatter than Mike, he was much stronger and could beat him up; so Mike went to shut the door. Then he walked back into the room and went for the cigarettes.

They smoked for ten minutes and then Jack said, "It's twenty to 1 — let's go. Mike, you throw the cigs away. You put the album away, Bill. I'll turn the radio off."

Jack turned it off and said slowly, "I'll wait for you outside."

Then he put his coat on and went out. He wished his mother didn't have to work.

In a few minutes the other two walked out.

"Let's go to the candy store and have some fun," said Bill, a smile on his face.

"Sure, and I got a great idea how to do it," Jack said, the words bubbling out of him. "Me and Mike will act as stallie. Now here's the way we

do it. Bill, you walk in first. Make like you're lookin' at the comics, then we'll come in and walk to the other side of the store — the one the jukebox is near. When we get there, Mike will say, 'Hey, Mister, what's this candy over here?' When he comes over to us, stuff your pockets and walk out. Got it?"

"Right."

"Then let's go."

They went into the store, each one knowing he had a responsibility, each one depending on the other. Shivers went up and down Bill's spine. He was always scared when he pulled a job. But he never wanted to admit it. Once he tried to stop but he couldn't. He just couldn't. Then he heard Mike's voice: "Hey, Mister, what's this candy over here?"

"What candy?"

"This one over here," answered Mike, holding it up just low enough so the man couldn't see it.

"I'm comin' over to see it," said the storekeeper, walking toward them.

Bill sighed and proceeded to stuff his pockets, then turned and slowly walked out.

"Sorry, Mister, we found out what it is and don't want it," Mike said.

They went out leaving the storekeeper muttering words not fit for a lady's or anybody's ears.

Jack was munching on a candy bar as he said, "Well, that was easy."

"Sure, for you. You didn't do anything. Thought the guy was goin' to knock my block off."

"Hey, stop arguing, you two — that's the 1 o'clock bell."

"Come on, we're late," yelled Bill, running into the school, followed by Mike and Jack.

They ran up four flights of stairs, then down a long hall into a classroom, hung up their coats, and ran to their seats in less than a minute. As soon as they sat down, the teacher came in. Jack sighed and said, "Oh, are we lucky. If we came in a second later, we would have been marked down for bein' late."

A small light-haired boy named Robert got up from his seat and walked over to Mrs. Jacobs, the teacher. He started to whisper to her and point to them.

"Maybe he's tellin'?" said Bill.

"I'll kill him if he does," answered Jack, making a fist.

"Look, she's beckoning to us," said Bill.

"Come on."

"Good luck," whispered some kids as the three boys passed their desks, walking to the teacher.

When they reached her, she said, "Boys, you have been picking on the children too long. Now you shall be punished."

Mrs. Jacobs walked to her desk, took out three cards, wrote something on them, walked back to the boys, and said, "Here is a discipline card for each of you. Instead of having it signed, bring your mothers up. Understand?"

"Yes," the three boys said.

"Good. Now go to your seats. Oh,

yes, I want you to stay in this afternoon."

They walked to their seats. The little boy Robert went slowly to his seat. He just realized they were going to beat him up if they could get him.

All that afternoon they did what is commonly known as a "slow burn."

Finally the 3 o'clock bell rang. They jumped up and ran for their clothing.

"Mike, Bill, and Jack, stay after class," said the teacher sharply. They went back to their seats and she continued in the same tone of voice, "Bill, take the basket around and clean up the floor. You two take the stacks of paper in the closet and put them on the table in back of the room."

At 3:30 she said, "All right, you can go now."

They got their clothing and ran out of the room.

When they were out of the school, Jack said, "Hey, wait a minute. Robert lives two blocks from the school. Right?"

"Right," echoed Bill and Mike.

"Well, what are we waitin' for? We can go there, beat him up, and then get home in ten minutes."

"Let's go," said Bill.

"Well, I don't know. My mother will be awful mad," said Mike.

"Ten minutes won't make much difference. Now, are you comin' or not?"

"Let's go," said Mike uneasily.

They ran two blocks and then they saw him, sharpening a knife on the stone in front of his house. Jack crept up behind him, followed by the other two. He pulled the knife out of Robert's hand. Robert turned and saw them, then pushed right through and started to run down the block. Jack threw the knife at him. Then they started after him. Jack picked up the knife, smiled, and rejoined the other two.

A policeman walked by and saw them and laughed. "Probably a race." Then he saw the knife in Jack's hand. He stood there stunned for a minute, then started to chase them. Robert ducked into an apartment house.

"Wait a minute," said Jack. "Who's in back of us?"

"A cop," said Bill. "We better get out of here."

"Come on. We'll go through the alley into the courtyard and double back through the tunnel," yelled Jack, running into the alley. They stopped at the entrance of the courtyard.

"Is he coming?"

"I don't see him."

"Look, Bill, Mike, there's Bobby," said Jack, pointing to the little figure with a grin on his face. Then Jack lunged with all his might and fell on the boy. They wrestled for a few seconds, then Bill yelled, "The cop's comin', let's go!"

They ran into a cellar and hid.

"Where's Jack?" whispered Bill.

"He's still out there," said Mike. "Come on, Jack!"

"I can't. He's got hold of my foot."

"Well, use that knife you're holdin'!"

The policeman was running down the alley when he saw Jack ready to plunge the knife into Robert's stomach.

He pulled out his gun and fired. Jack fell to the ground. Robert just lay there. The policeman came running over to him, thinking, "I couldn't have killed him — a little kid like that."

Mike and Bill hid in the doorway of the cellar.

"You think he's dead?" asked Mike.

"I don't know. He's lying so still," answered Bill.

The cop knelt over Jack's body and felt his pulse.

"Is he dead?" asked Robert.

"Yes, he's dead. Oh, God, forgive me." He started to cry.

Mike and Bill walked slowly away, tears flowing from their eyes. "Why?" said Mike. "*WHY?*"

Jack could be your kid.

Is he?

FOR MYSTERY FANS — these swiftly paced mystery-thrillers, all MERCURY PUBLICATIONS, are now on sale at your newsstand:

A MERCURY MYSTERY — "Baltimore Madame" (formerly "Madame Baltimore"), by Helen Knowland. "Suspenseful. . . . High voltage," says the *Saturday Review.*

A BESTSELLER MYSTERY — "Make Haste to Live," by the Gordons. ". . . brilliant new novel of suspense . . ." comments the Los Angeles *Herald Express.*

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY — "Kiss for a Killer" (formerly "The Scarlet Imperial"), by Dorothy B. Hughes. ". . . clutches at the reader's throat," reports the New York *Times.*

Now, an altogether different kettle of fish . . . William D. Gent, our other twelve-year-old author, appears under a pseudonym. His father works for an American Embassy in Ireland, and his mother informed us that "after some discussion with other members of the Embassy, we were advised that it would be wiser to use a pen-name." It was the boy-author's mother who originally submitted her son's story, telling us that the boy "reads EQMM avidly — but only after his father is through with it." After we accepted "The Black Ruby," young William wrote us about himself, and again we quote verbatim:

> *When I was nine years old we were transferred to Ireland. Mom told me to keep a diary but I couldn't bother writing every night. I started school here and for the first few weeks found it difficult. Then I made some friends and got more used to the difference in classes and discipline and having masters instead of women teachers. They make you behave more. One day a friend and I were talking and we said it would be a good idea if a satire were written on the subject of the tough guy American Private Eye. So I wrote one . . . My hobbies are Magic; writing; puppet shows; and riding my new bike . . .*

Well, there you have it: an entirely different slant on the detective story by another American boy — a parody on the hardboiled school which is strictly an American subspecies. And in William Gent's broad burlesque you will find all the characteristics of the tough 'tec — all but one; you will find the hard action, the violence and brutality, the traditional raison d'être (this time, a fabulous black ruby), the lacquer of romance, the bludgeonings and beatings — yes, all the elements except one, and surely that one is not an aspect of the tough 'tec that even a precocious twelve-year-old should be familiar with — at least, not enough to write about authoritatively.

THE BLACK RUBY

by WILLIAM D. GENT

I AM MIKE MULLIGAN, THAT'S MY name. I'm a private dick. I work on my own cases. I've been writing my memoirs in the form of separate books like *The Lion*, *The Scarlet Crow*, etc. In *The Scarlet Crow* I tell about how Biram Beeswax was first captured. Well, about a year ago, I get

this letter from Inspector Bernack of the New York Police Force, 12th Precinct. It says:

Dear Mister Mulligan:

I am sorry to inform you that Biram Beeswax has escaped from Losey Prison. You will have to lie low for a while.

Sincerely yours,
Inspector Bernack

I gather that Biram has escaped from the Pen and I'm to stay put. Well, I know what's good for me, so I obey the letter and sleep in the office. Then one day there is a knock at my door. Business isn't good and I am just getting ready to write the story of the First National Bank Robbery, but I throw down my pencil and answer the door. On the threshold there is a fat man. He looks very worried.

"I have lost my ruby," he says.

"Look, wise guy," I says, "I don't care whether you lost the Empire State Building. What do you want?"

I am very angry at being stopped just when I'm going to write about the First National Bank Robbery.

"I am Hubert Hodgepodge. I own the famous Black Ruby, worth over $1,000,000, and it has been stolen."

When I hear the price I get happy again. I see that he is very worried, so I invite him in and sit him down. Then he tells all the story.

"As I said before, I own the famous Black Ruby. Well, I had dinner last night and went to bed, without even going into the living room. My secretary will testify to that. Then, about 7 in the morning, my secretary woke me up and told me that the Ruby was missing. He had gone to get my papers out ready for work, and had discovered the theft."

"Hmmm. Sounds like he must have done it," I says.

"No, no. Fenkinson has been with me for seventeen years, and in the family for more than thirty."

"Well, then, you'd better let me see him," I says.

"All right. I'll have Jenkins drive you down. I'll get the Police."

"No, no," I says, "that would bring you publicity and would make a scandal. Just tell Inspector Bernack."

"Right-o. Jenkins is downstairs."

Chapter II

Well, then I go down to this Jenkins and tell him to take me to Hubert's classy joint.

Soon we pull up in front of a big white house. I get out and walk up to the door. I ring the bell and soon the butler comes and opens the door. Immediately I am suspicious.

I ask him where the room is and he shows me. I look around and I find nothing except an unsmoked cigar that was in the cigar box.

I know that within two hours Bernack, whether told by Hubert to keep quiet or not, would have the place swarming with cops. Well, I was right because Hubert comes home

with the cops and says that he couldn't keep them from coming because they said it was their duty. Well, Bernack and his boys search the place and take fingerprints. The fingerprints point to my first suspicion, the butler. He is questioned and hasn't got an alibi.

Then it comes out. Hubert confesses to taking this butler out of prison for a new start. His first conviction was for robbery, too. The police are satisfied and take him down to the station.

Then he is given the third degree because he won't crack. After a few trips with the rubber hose, he begins to whimper. Then they give him another one. They put a pail over his head and beat on it without stopping. Enough to drive you mad.

Well, the butler cracks and makes a full confession. He signs it and it's brought to court. The defense makes a great play on the poor family angle, but when it comes out that this guy has no family, the case collapses. He is sentenced to 50 years in prison. I am still not quite easy though. I don't feel that the butler really did it. So I start to do some investigating on my own.

By the way, the only thing the cops didn't get was the Black Ruby. It just disappeared.

Chapter III

I goes to Hubert's place again and look in the safe. I look very carefully for about an hour. Then I find it. A little chip of the Ruby no bigger than this — (.) — right in a corner. I know that if I take this to a jewelry store they'll be able to tell whether they got a black ruby with a chip out of it. I wonder why the cops hadn't thought of that.

Well, I go to the Sparkle Jewelry Store first, which is the biggest store in town. I ask the guy behind the counter whether he's had any black rubies in lately. He says no and that if they had he'd know, because he's the second foreman.

One down and about 100 to go. The next stop is Axmen's, the next biggest jewelry store in town.

"I am looking for a black ruby. Had any lately?" I says.

"Nope. What would we have a black ruby for?"

Well, I next go to Meaning's and there I says, "Have you had any black rubies in lately?"

"Well, yes," says the man, "about four days ago. Why do you want to know?"

"I'm a police officer," I says, producing my fake police badge.

"What do you want to know?"

"What did the guy that give it to you look like?"

"Tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with a pug nose."

"What did you say?" I screeched. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure. And this ruby had a chip out of it too."

"But then — gosh — gee — it must be the same one. Okay, bud," I says, "I'll take it in the name of the law."

"All right, sir."

Why am I incredulous? Because the description given me was not that of the butler, but of the secretary!

Chapter IV

Well, I rush out and get into the car. I have to get the secretary and find out what he knows. I do not know where to find him, but then it hits me! I never forget a face and I remember that one. It was Gentleman Jim or "Dandy" — the handsomest crook in New York. Now I know where I'll find him. He'll be in Tony Italy's, which is a classy gambling joint.

I wheel the car around and make a U turn in a one-way street, collide with a truck, back up and let the truck pass, then go down a no-entry street at 55 mph.

With a screech I pull up on the no-parking side of the street in front of Tony's. I rush in and grab Jim, and before the two tough guys at the bar can stop me, I am out of the door.

These guys rush after me but I have my gat out by this time and I plug them both in the chest.

I dump the Dandy in the car and drive at an average speed of 55 mph to my office. I rush him upstairs and dump him in the back room where I keep my rubber hose and the heater for making guys talk.

First I tell him I'm gonna make him talk and tell me everything. Then, unknown to him, I switch on my little pocket wire-recorder that served me so well in the "Scarlet Crow" case. I figure I might need it because he'd probably refuse to talk in public. Well, he refuses the first time, but I pick up the rubber hose, and start in. After the fourth time he begins to weaken. At the fifth time he says, "O.K., I'll talk, I'll talk. Don't do it again. I'll talk."

Then he tells me the story, which I record:

"Well, you see, after I escaped from prison about four years ago, I had to lie low till the hue and cry had stopped. Well, every time I thought it was safe, someone would write to newspapers about my escape. Finally, this year I made it. I joined up with Hubert, who had taken out a $5,000,000 policy on the Black Ruby. He then told me of this neat way of taking the Ruby and pinning it on the butler. Well, we started and it worked. I don't know how you got on my trail, but you caught me. I swear I thought that Hubert was true all the time until a few days after the robbery. Then he told me he had killed the real Hubert and wasn't Hubert at all but . . ."

Three shots resound, and the Dandy drops without a sound. This guy knows how to shoot, I think, but I can't find where the shots came from. And there is the secretary dead and not able to talk.

Chapter V

Well, after some thought, I see that I may be convicted of murder, so I get into the car and put in the Dandy. Then I drive to a deserted spot in the river and heave the body in. So I'm

free of that. Well, I turn around and then it happens.

I am hit on the head and crumple in a heap. . . .

I wake up in a damp room that smells of the river. There is no one in the room. I look around and spot something in the right corner. I roll over (my hands are tied behind my back and my feet too), and wriggle over to the corner, where I find that the object I saw is a nail. This is lucky. I wriggle into a sitting position, catch the rope around my hands on the nail, then I start to saw. For what seems like two hours, I saw back and forth, back and forth. My wrists are bleeding and the sweat pours from my forehead, my hands are aching from the movement; back and forth, back and forth. By the time I have finished my wrists have no skin on them at all, but I pluck up courage and untie my feet. Then I stretch my legs and very carefully I walk around to get the blood circulating again.

Then there is the sound of footsteps outside the door. I hurry to my first place and put the ropes around my legs and arms to look as if I was tied. A tough comes in and says, "O.K., wise guy, you're getting a good look at the boss."

And with that the door opens and the boss walks in.

Chapter VI

What can describe my surprise when I see who the boss is? Who can mistake that pudgy face and that slim mustache? Yep, the boss is none other than Biram Beeswax!

"Mister Mulligan again," he says. "Charmed, I'm sure."

"What's the racket this time, Biram," I says.

"Nothing, except some insurance money to be collected."

"Yeh, but I got the Black Ruby in my office."

"So I hear," he says. "By the way, I killed your secretary."

At this I switch on my pocket recorder.

"Quite a racket, Biram, quite a racket. By the way, how did you bump off the real Hubert?"

"That was easy. He took a trip in his private yacht. The crew was in my pay, they killed him, I boarded, took his place, and killed them so they would not talk."

"And you picked up the secretary here, eh?"

"Yes. By the way, I have to put you out of the way, my friend, this time for good."

"Oh?" says I.

"Right. Men! Ready, aim and — uhhuh."

I clout him on the head with the butt of my gat, Totsy. Then I reverse the gun and shoot six times. Each shot gets a thug in the belly, two for each one. They crumple to the floor, but Biram staggers up. He draws a little "Three-Point" gun with twelve barrels in it. He raises it, but I am too quick. I kick the gun out of his hand. Then — for the second time — we meet again.

He comes at me with a right uppercut which staggers me. But I reply with a solid punch to the groin. He gives me one on the nose. I give him one that won't make his eye any better. Then he swings and misses — a perfect opening for my Mike Mulligan Finish: a punch to the kidneys, then a double rabbit punch and a kick in the shins. He goes down and I kick him square in the face.

This leaves me with one knocked-out guy and three corpses. So I call Inspector Bernack.

When he comes, they find Biram's plan all written out on a paper in his pocket and my recorder clinches the case.

At the trial, Biram's lawyer gives a great play on the "had-to-get-some-money" business but, besides robbery and murder, he has to answer for breaking prison. So when the jury gives out with a "Guilty," the judge mercifully sentences him to only life. The butler was released and is now going straight. He wants to join with me, and maybe I'll let him.

But just now I am going to write the famous case of the First National Bank Robbery. Which ought to give the public a big shock.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Five prize-winning stories, including:

Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice's AUTOPSY AND EVA
Ring Lardner's CLAUDE DIPHTHONG, STUDENT OF CRIME

an exciting new short detective novel by the First Prize winner in last year's contest:

Roy Vickers's FIND THE INNOCENT

and five other fine tales of crime and detection — including a new department, The Burglars' Club, with stories by Don Marquis and Ellis Parker Butler

So far, a serious story about juvenile delinquency and a satire on the hardboiled school, both by twelve-year-old American boys. Now, still another kettle of ferrets — this time what might be called a traditional 'tec, straight and pure, and by an eight-and-a-half-year-old American schoolgirl . . .

Again it was the young author's mother who submitted the story, writing: "It seems to have all the ingredients of a detective story — plot, humor, characterization, and romance — and told with a rare economy of words."

We agreed, and purchased the story pronto — and our plans for a "Children's Hour" were growing even beyond our wildest dreams.

Little Kristin Field was born in Washington, D. C., but she has spent most of her eight and a half years in Switzerland and Germany. Her father is a librarian, and her mother, to increase the family income, has written travel articles from abroad. During her brief academic career Kristin has attended a variety of European schools — in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Bad Godesberg bei Bonn — and she naturally speaks German as fluently as English. Kristin's biggest problem in life, according to her mother, is that she is a girl — she would like to be a boy; she uses up a great deal of her time and energy trying to surpass the exploits of her older brother. Swimming is Kristin's favorite sport and last year she won first place in a local competition for girls of ten and under.

Here is further information about Kristin, as written by the author herself (and this time we have not changed any of the spelling):

> *My hobies are swimming, bike rideing, going to the movies, reading comics, playing hopscotch, blowing bubbles with bubble gum, going to Brownie scout meetings, eating, and righting stories.*

Lord High Educators, in your Ivory Towers, take heed . . . Little Kristin Field, her mother adds, not only keeps busy with her varied activities but generally gets excellent grades in school and is also a prolific writer of letters to friends and family back home.

Instead of setting up Kristin's story in type, we are reproducing her original manuscript. You might be interested to learn that this story was a composition for her English class, and that it earned a mark of "Very Good" from her fourth grade teacher in The American School on the Rhine.

The Detective.

once long ago in Texes lived a man. He was called a detective. And Do you know what a detective is? what you don't, well I'll tell you. A detective is somebody who helps Someone find footprints or somthing like that. I will go on with my Story about the man in Texes. There was a mun in texes. he was a detective. a rich lady had 12 0000, dollars Stolen. Then the detective got his pipe and glass. He found the footprints of the man and the detective found the man and put him in Vail. the lady got her money Back. She Thanked The detective. The detective got 2,000, dollars reward. And The lady and the detective lived happy everafter.

The end

And finally, our youngest author, Todd Capp, who was only five and three-quarters years old when he wrote "Eddy Takes Vanishing Lessons." And again we have an entirely different approach to the tale of mystery — this time, the ghost story . . . According to Todd Capp's father, young Toddy is a very normal boy — and now we quote directly from Mr. Capp's letter: "— except that Todd adds, subtracts, and divides, reads and writes (and we don't know how he learned because neither his mother nor I could do any of these very well, especially at Toddy's age). He is a blue-eyed, towheaded, olive-skinned lad, and knocks off a painting now and then which I steal and hang up in the apartment and at least three out of every ten people who see it insist they have seen the original at the Modern Museum. His best painting is 'Gladys On A Sort Of A Horse'."

Actually, young Toddy's story appears in EQMM as a reprint. It was first published in a camp newspaper — "Our Junior Caller," the junior paper at Camp Woodland in upstate New York. Toddy was there last summer.

When Toddy's father read the story in the camp paper, he told his son that he thought the story very interesting and was pretty proud of Toddy for having written it. Toddy was thoughtful for some time, then he took his father aside and said: "Pop, I didn't really invent that story. I think I heard something like it or read something like it some place . . . You see, Pop, I made it up — the words, I mean — but I think somewhere I knew about the idea." And then young Toddy concluded: "You see, Pop, I'm the author of it, but I didn't invent it."

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings . . . No wonder his father is even prouder now of his son!

EDDY TAKES VANISHING LESSONS

by TODD CAPP

ONCE UPON A TIME LITTLE EDDY walked into his grandma's house, which was supposed to be haunted because everybody that went in the house came out scared stiff because they saw an army of skeletons before them. So, of course he wanted to find out why and how. He wanted to learn how to vanish. He walked up the stairs scared stiff and he opened the squeaky

door. The door went squeak, squeak. He searched in his pockets and found some oil and he oiled up the squeaky door. Then he closed the door and it was still squeaky. He searched in his pocket again for the oil and found that the can of oil was empty. He thought to himself, "I can't go in. I can't go in."

Then suddenly he changed his mind and went in. Then he saw a white shadow on the stairs. Then he walked through the scarey hallway. Then he saw it was a ghost but just before he could move, the ghost jumped and said a loud, "*BOOOOOOOOO!*" And he was scared stiff and he hid behind the sofa. Then when the coast was clear he jumped up from behind the sofa and gave a loud, "*BOOOOOOOO!*" The ghost woke up scared stiff and said, "Ghosts are supposed to scare people, but the people aren't supposed to scare ghosts." So the ghost said, "What would you like to do most?"

"I would like to be a ghost," Eddy said.

"All right. What is one of the top things you would like to do of a ghost's job? Go through keyholes, or fly, or stuff like that?"

"Well, I guess I would like to vanish. Would that be all right?"

"Yes, under one condition."

"What's that?" said Eddy, surprised.

"I'll tell you," said the ghost. "These are my easy terms. You promise not to tell anyone about this. If you promise not to scare me I will never scare you or any of your friends and I will teach you how to vanish."

"Can you?" said Eddy, surprised.

"Sure, I can," said the ghost. "Wanna see me?"

So the ghost just started to vanish and Eddy could hardly believe his eyes and then the ghost just reappeared just in time before Eddy could scream. So the next day, he started taking vanishing lessons and before the summer was over he knew how to vanish and he surprised all the kids at school. From that day on everybody was asking him how he learned to vanish but he never told the secret.

Another original for our **Black Mask** *department*

At the outbreak of World War II, Ben Benson was a salesman for Thomas J. Lipton, Inc., selling "brisk" tea and dehydrated soups in northeast Massachusetts and in New Hampshire. He entered military service in 1943 and eventually became a machine-gun squad leader with the 38th Armored Division, in the European theater of war. He was in the thick of the Battle of the Bulge, and was seriously wounded in action near Ardennes. The next three years were even more rugged: fourteen Army hospitals, both overseas and in the United States, and several major operations. He was discharged in 1947 with two rows of "fruit salad," the Purple Heart, the Combat Infantry Badge, two bronze battle stars, and a pair of crutches — all of which he got the hard way. Ben Benson is a lot of man.

It was during his hospital days at Cushing General in Framingham, Massachusetts, and Murphy General in Waltham, Massachusetts, that Mr. Benson first met A. S. Burack, editor and publisher of "The Writer," that excellent magazine for professional and would-be writers, and Mrs. Bernard DeVoto, wife of the Pulitzer Prize historian; they were doing volunteer rehabilitation work among the wounded veterans. Both encouraged Mr. Benson to write, and from the very beginning Mr. Benson showed the literary stuff he is made of — his first story was accepted by the first magazine to which it was submitted. More sales followed — many more — and then Mr. Benson acquired a literary agent under whose guidance he promptly sold a four-part serial to "The Saturday Evening Post."

Now we bring you Ben Benson's first short story for EQMM. It is about Wade Paris of the Massachusetts State Police — the same tough Detective-Inspector ("Old Icewater") you met in Mr. Benson's recent novels, THE VENUS DEATH *and* TARGET IN TAFFETA.

SOMEBODY HAS TO MAKE A MOVE

by BEN BENSON

THE HOUSE THEY WERE WATCHING stood on a small grassy knoll at the edge of the woods. A bright, cheerful little bungalow with gay yellow shingles, red shutters, and chintzy little curtains peeking out the sides of the windows. Beside the house was a little one-car detached

garage, the overhead door closed.

The house stood high and alone in the sun — a little proudly, perhaps, considering its small size and the wide expanse of lawn. A hundred yards below it ran the two-lane secondary highway, twisting away to the west and disappearing in the trees. At the east end of the road, hidden by the trees and foliage, a detective car — a black sedan — was parked. Behind it was a two-tone blue police cruiser, with state shields on the door panels and white lettering on the rear deck that said *Massachusetts State Police.*

Detective-Inspector Wade Paris stood at the edge of the woods, staring up at the house, his mouth a thin slash, his hands thrust deeply into the pockets of his tweed jacket. Beside him, a young trooper named Kelly fixed the visor of his cap to shade the sun from his eyes, then adjusted the Winchester rifle in the crook of his arm.

"Awfully quiet in there, sir," Kelly said.

Wade Paris turned away without answering. He walked back, past the detective sedan to the cruiser. Inside, through the open window, he heard the corporal talking on the short-wave radio. "— do you have that, Ed? Come in, 16."

There was a garbled rasp from the radio speaker and the corporal flicked his switch again. "Cruiser 44 to 16. Ed, move in and take position at junction of Routes 120 and 3. 44 off."

The corporal hung up the handphone, turned his head to Paris, and said, "That's it, Inspector. Everything is boxed tight."

"Fine," Paris said briefly. But he knew it wasn't fine at all. A nineteen-year-old cop killer named Fred Morgan had forced himself into that house about an hour ago. They had chased him west after the holdup and killing, losing the getaway car and twenty precious minutes in a traffic snarl at a junction. Then, speeding past the little house, they had suddenly come upon a state cruiser waiting at a roadblock ahead. They had backtracked then, carefully, painstakingly, house-by-house, to the little bungalow on the hill. A Mrs. Beal and her one-year-old baby lived there, according to the neighbors down the road. Mr. Beal was a salesman, away on a trip. And Paris remembered leaving the detective sedan, coming up the little flagstones to the house, and being fired on by Morgan from behind the window. Paris had returned to the edge of the woods. Now a half hour had passed and he was worried about Mrs. Beal and the baby. And he was thinking, *No, it wasn't fine at all.*

The corporal said, "There's a chance we can smoke him out, sir." His eyes moved, sweeping the edge of the underbrush where two other troopers were keeping watch on the house. One of them carried a shotgun. The other, leaning against a tree, was loading a tear-gas shell into the breech of a short, fat-barreled gas gun. "Slade could get up closer and drop a

couple of gas shells in through that side window. He's good at it, Inspector."

"Not with a baby in the house," Paris said. "The kid's only a year old. The gas might kill it."

He left the corporal, returning slowly to the edge of the woods. Kelly, standing there, turned his head slightly and shifted his black-booted legs.

"Any movement?" Paris asked.

"No, sir. Not a thing." Kelly ran a young, impatient hand over the barrel of the Winchester.

"There'll be no shooting," Paris said, watching him. Then he turned because he had heard the whine of tires in the distance. Looking down the tree-lined road he saw another state cruiser coming up fast. The cruiser stopped with a squeal of brakes, and a trooper stepped out and hurried over to him.

"The sergeant sent me up," the trooper said. "It's a girl, sir. We stopped her car at the roadblock. Her name's Gloria Morgan. In the car she had an overnight bag stuffed with men's clothes. She's carrying over seven hundred bucks in her wallet."

Paris walked back with him to the cruiser. In the rear seat sat a girl, a handbag clasped tightly in her lap. She was wearing a green bolero jacket, a blouse with small polka-dots, and a green skirt. Her chestnut hair was soft and curly, parted in the middle and combed back. He saw a provocative, tilted little nose and a curve of lipstick that accentuated a pale, worried face. *About twenty-five years old*, he thought, *and very pretty, too.*

"Would you step out, Miss Morgan?" he asked.

She came out, her skirt hiking up as she stepped down to the road, showing a shapely knee, a slim length of nylon hose, and brown suede pumps. As she faced him he saw she was rather small, but trim and well-formed. She looked up at him with wide hazel eyes.

"You're the State Police detective?" she asked.

"My name is Paris," he said.

"Yes, they told me," she said, taking in the tallness of him, the short brown hair, the strong width of his shoulders, the hard crinkly lines around his eyes, the tanned, set face, the wrinkled tweed suit. Clinging to his trouser legs were bits of brambles. His shoes were dusty. "I thought you would be older."

"Well, I'm pretty old," he said patiently.

"No, I mean *really* old," she said abstractly. "Not thirty-fivish. When they stopped me, the troopers said they were bringing me to see 'Old Icewater'."

Paris stared at the trooper, whose eyes quickly focused above Paris's head. "It's a nickname," Paris said heavily. "What are you to Fred Morgan?"

"His sister," she said, her hands twisting her bag. "What have you done with him?"

"We haven't taken him yet," Paris said. He pointed through the trees to

the house. "Your brother's in there. You were bringing him money to help him escape, weren't you?"

"Yes," she said without hesitation. "He phoned me in Boston an hour ago. He told me he was hiding here and he was in trouble. I was to get clothes and money together and come right out. That seven hundred is all I had in the bank. Every cent."

"Nice going, Miss Morgan," he said bitterly.

"I'm his sister," she said intensely. "I did what I had to do. Anyone would have done the same. You would have, too." She tugged at his arm. "You have to stop it, Inspector."

"Stop what?"

"Please," she said. "These troopers think he's killed a police officer. The minute he leaves that house they'll shoot him down."

"Not if he throws out the pistol first," Paris said. "Miss Morgan, you'll have to go back now."

"Wait," she said. "I want to tell you *why* I'm here."

"You've already told me," he said, beginning to move away.

"Please," she said, following him. "Fred's only nineteen years old."

"I know your brother's age," Paris said. "I've also seen his record. Today he killed a police officer, Miss Morgan."

"No!" She almost shouted. "Over the phone Fred told me it was the other two. He was in the getaway car. He didn't realize it had happened."

Paris stopped. "The facts are these, Miss Morgan. There were three of them in the car. Your brother was at the wheel. They held up a gas station. The attendant didn't put up a fight, but they hit him with a tire iron anyway. A local cop was coming by in his police car. He ran out toward them. Your brother shot and killed him."

"No," she said desperately. "Fred wouldn't —"

Paris shook his head. "It's no use, Miss Morgan. The other two were in the gas station when the cop arrived. Your brother was outside in the car. He shot the cop down, then raced away leaving his buddies flat. We picked them up quick, and they talked just as quick."

"And they blamed it on Fred," she said bitterly. "Naturally. They were facing the electric chair."

"Their gun was a .45. The cop was killed with a .38. Your brother has it now — a .38 German Luger."

Her face puckered as she peered down to the ground. Then her eyes came up. "Please, let me talk to him."

"Why?"

"I could get him out of the house. I *know* I can."

His mouth compressed, a little muscle twitching in his cheek. "I'm willing to try anything, Miss Morgan," he said. "Go ahead. But not up to the house. Call him from the edge of the trees."

They walked down the road to where Trooper Kelly stood, straddle-legged, holding the Winchester.

"From here," Paris said to her.

She stepped out into the open, the breeze riffling her hair and rustling her skirt.

She cupped her hands to her mouth and called, "Fred! Fred!"

There was no answer. Behind her, Paris and Kelly stood silently.

"Fred," she called again, her voice becoming slightly hysterical. "It's Gloria. Please throw the gun away and come out. They promised they won't harm you."

There was no answer. She waited as the seconds ticked by. Then she turned slowly and walked back to Paris. Her small shoulders were slumped and dejected.

"Maybe he's not in there," she said in a tiny voice.

"He's in there," Paris said. "And a woman and baby are in there with him."

"Oh, my Lord," she said. "How —?"

"He broke in."

"But Fred wouldn't harm them — especially a baby!"

"Not now, he wouldn't. She and her baby are no good to him dead. He needs them as hostages — or even as shields."

Another state cruiser drove up, and a trooper slid out before the car came to a complete stop. He was big-boned and rangy, with a hard, craggy jaw. As he moved toward them, his captain's gold insignia flashed in the sun. Paris left her and went over to him.

She watched them together, seeing Paris pointing to the curve of the woods, the captain nodding his head. Then four troopers came out of the car, deploying off to the side of the road, rifles in their hands, their big flap holsters bobbing at their sides.

Paris came back to her and said, "You'll have to go back now, Miss Morgan."

"Wait," she said. "What are they doing? Surrounding the house?"

"Not entirely. We're leaving him an escape route in the back."

"Why?" she asked. "It can only be a trick on your part."

"An invitation for him to leave the house," Paris said. "It's more important for the woman and baby to be safe."

"Oh," she said. Then her eyes narrowed. "What chance would Fred have in the woods?"

"None. He'd be cut off. We'd bring the bloodhounds in."

"You're letting him out so you can track him down like a wild animal. Ten of you against one nineteen-year-old boy."

"What do you expect?" he said harshly. "Sporting rules? Did he give that cop a chance? Or the woman and the baby?"

"He hasn't harmed the woman and the baby!"

"He hasn't let them out of the house. He's keeping them in line of fire."

"Fred doesn't understand those things," she said. "He's never had a chance himself." She saw Paris staring motionless at the house. "Are you listening to me, Inspector?"

"Go on," he said. "But spare the hearts and flowers."

"You're interested in facts," she said doggedly. "I'll give you the facts. My mother died when we were young. Maybe she was better off because my father was a drunk with a long criminal record. He was cruel and vicious, and had no sense of civic or family responsibility. We lived in the slums and we'd have starved if it wasn't for the welfare. My father married again, but my stepmother was a drunken slattern. When I was old enough I left home. I had to. I couldn't stand it. I took a civil service job in Washington. Two years ago I came back to Boston."

"You should have stayed away."

"I *had* to come back," she said. "I learned that Fred had gone to jail for armed robbery. I saw the pattern of his life becoming like his father's. When I visited Fred I told him that when he got out he would come and live with me. I had faith in him. I knew he could be rehabilitated." She looked up at Paris. "You do believe in rehabilitation, don't you?"

"Keep me out of this, Miss Morgan. Just tell your story."

Two red spots appeared high in her cheeks. "I had faith in Fred," she said. "I was working in an insurance company and sharing an apartment with two other girls and I had saved some money. When Fred was released I took an apartment in the Fenway. Fred came to live with me. He had a job as a shipping clerk. You see, he was honestly trying."

"Don't make a hero out of him," Paris said. "He had to have a job before they'd let him out on parole."

"I can understand why they call you 'Old Icewater'," she said bitterly. "You have no faith in *anybody*."

"I believe only what I see," he said distantly. "Not what a sister tells me about her brother. Is that the end of your story?"

"No," she said stubbornly. "I met a young man and fell in love with him. His name is David and he wants to marry me. But I've held him off."

"It's too bad you have skeletons in the family closet."

"No. I told David everything and he understands. He said it makes no difference. I was beginning to think so, too. Because before this I was sure it was only environment. Now I'm afraid it may be heredity. If Fred is bad because of the blood, then I'd have the terrible fear that, if I had a son, he might be bad, too. I couldn't take the chance of marrying David — it wouldn't be fair to him."

"Well, that's *your* problem, Miss Morgan."

"Yes," she said, almost whispering now. "What do you care what happens to Fred or to me or to anybody? You'd just as soon kill my brother and get it over with."

"Look," Paris said, his voice tight, "we called on your brother to surrender. He shouted he'd kill the first cop who came near him. What do you expect us to do? Pat him on the head?"

"If you could only understand him," she said. "Fred is weak and he was influenced in this. He's in there scared to death. And I know he'd surrender if he had the chance."

"Why do you know?"

"Because I know him. If I ever thought Fred was deliberately vicious and cruel like his father I wouldn't have come to help him. I'd give up David, too. I swear to God."

"Don't give away your life so cheaply, Miss Morgan."

"With that hanging over me, I'd have no life," she said brokenly. "Please. Let me try once more. I'll go up to the house. I'll talk to him inside."

"Not a chance," he said sharply.

"He'd come out with me. If I were with him —"

"Forget it. There are two hostages in there now."

"Then you come with me," she said. "If you're not carrying a gun in your hand, if we'd walk up there side by side —" She broke off. "You wouldn't do it, would you?"

"It wouldn't be very smart."

"Of course," she said. "You don't *want* to give him a chance. But I know he wouldn't shoot if he saw you were unarmed. I'd stake my life on it."

And mine, too, Paris thought, looking back at Captain Dolliver and the troopers flanking the road. Yet the longer they waited, the more panicky Morgan might become — and the more danger to Mrs. Beal and the baby.

"All right," he said abruptly. "We'll try it."

Her eyes brimmed. "You believe me about Fred now?"

His jaw line was rigid. "No. But somebody has to make a move."

He came out of the clump of trees with her, starting across the gravel path that ran along the bottom of the knoll. They walked side by side up the hill, the girl grasping Paris's hand firmly.

In the house a front window suddenly opened. A white curtain, caught by the breeze, flapped out and rippled.

Paris, his eyes straight ahead, said softly, "He's standing behind the window with the Luger. At this distance there's no accuracy, Miss Morgan. He might aim for me and hit you. You want to keep going?"

"He won't shoot," she said tersely.

They continued up the hill. He could hear her breath coming out in short, uneven gasps. Above them the window closed.

They came to a big flagstone at the front door. Paris said, "Stand aside, Miss Morgan."

"You promised not to shoot," she whispered.

"Get out of the way. Your brother might."

"Fred," she shouted. "They promised not to harm you. Open the door!"

"It's unlocked," Morgan's voice said from inside.

Paris turned the knob and swung

the door open. He started to enter but Gloria Morgan pushed by him.

Inside, opposite him, Paris saw Mrs. Beal standing against the fireplace. In her arms, fast asleep, was the baby. Behind her was Morgan. He gripped Mrs. Beal by the waist, holding her firmly in front of him.

"Are you all right, Mrs. Beal?" Paris asked. He saw she was a medium-sized woman of 30, in a flowered house dress. Her hair was disheveled, her lips pale and dry. She opened her mouth, but no words came out. Then Paris saw the Luger in Morgan's other hand, the muzzle pointing at him.

"Stay there," Morgan called to him in a high, keening voice.

"Fred," his sister called, moving closer. "They're not going to hurt you."

"Beat it," he said to her, keeping the pistol fixed on Paris.

"No," she said. "We're taking you out of here, Fred."

"You dirty —" Morgan said to her. "You brought the cops!"

"They stopped me," she said. "Down the road. They —"

But he was paying no attention to her. He inched the gun up, aiming it at Paris's chest. His knuckles whitened.

"Fred!" his sister screamed.

The Luger trembled violently in Morgan's hand. The corners of his mouth turned back in a distorted grimace. Suddenly he flung the gun away, turned and darted to the left.

Paris pounded after him, running hard, catching him in a narrow entry at the rear door. He twisted the boy around, one leg hooking under, throwing him to the floor face down. He had the handcuffs out in a split second, and pulling the wrists up behind the back, Paris snapped on the bracelets.

As he yanked Morgan to his feet, the girl came into the hallway. "You promised not to hurt him," she said.

"He's not hurt," Paris said. He pushed Morgan through the living room to the front door. Mrs. Beal was sobbing in a chair. Gloria Morgan

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bent over her and began rubbing Mrs. Beal's wrists.

"Will she be all right?" Paris asked.

"She's crying in relief," Gloria Morgan said. "And I feel like crying, too. Everything is all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," Paris said.

"Fred didn't try to kill you after all," she said, her eyes shiny and wet. "You had to understand him — like David and I understand him."

"Sure," Paris said softly. "Sure, Miss Morgan."

He sat at the report table in the sun-dappled guardroom of the barracks. In front of him was the Luger, a tag tied to the trigger guard. Captain Dolliver came out of his office and said, "Stay for supper, Wade. I'll tell the cook."

Paris stood up and put on his hat. "Thanks, Joe. But I've got to bring the gun to Ballistics."

Dolliver scratched his long, lean jaw. "Why didn't you tell the girl the truth, Wade?"

Paris didn't answer. He put the Luger into a cardboard box.

Dolliver said, "Morgan pulled the trigger on you. The gun jammed on him. Why didn't you tell her?"

"I couldn't do it," Paris said. "It gives her one decent thing to believe about him."

"It's a false belief, Wade." He said it with conviction.

"I know. But she happens to be a good kid, Joe."

"Hey, you old bachelor," Dolliver said, his eyebrows lifting humorously.

"Lay off," Paris said. "She'll marry David and raise a fine family. It gives her something in life, something to hang on to. The other way —" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Old Icewater," Dolliver laughed. "You're getting as soft as a grape."

Paris grinned. "I'll be seeing you, Joe," he said.

He picked up the cardboard box, went outside, and got into his car. He ran the window down. The breeze came in from the west, soft and scented like a girl's hand.

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THE PERSISTENT HOUSE-HUNTERS

by BECHHOFER ROBERTS

"WHENCE THE DISTRESS ON YOUR features, sweet my friend?" A.B.C. Hawkes asked me across the breakfast-table in our Mayfair flat one September morning.

I handed him a letter by way of answer.

He read it through carefully. "Frightened, is he? Wants you to bring me over to him, does he? Well, who is he? I wish you'd tell your correspondents to make their signatures readable. You have a curiously untidy set of friends, Johnstone."

"He's more than a friend, A.B.C.," I explained. "He's my cousin, Robin. I believe you met him a couple of years ago."

"The gardening maniac? The imbecile who asked me, as a scientist — as a *scientist*, mark you — to arrange the hundred-odd sorts or saxifrages in a series of ascending atomic weights?"

"He's sane enough away from his garden," I said. "That's why I'm worried by his letter. Shall we run down there? He lives on top of Leith Hill — it's only an hour's run."

A.B.C. shrugged his shoulders. "I can't go," he said. "I've a conference at the Air Ministry. Anyhow, what's your cousin worrying about? He's had an offer to rent his house for the winter at a price which he admits is twice its market value, and the would-be tenant, having failed to secure his acceptance of the offer, has apparently resorted to vague threats. Most owners of the country-houses would be only too glad to let their places so advantageously nowadays."

"He often lets it for the winter," I agreed, "and goes to Devonshire. His wife had TB a few years ago, and, though she was eventually cured, the doctors think that she ought to take good care of herself. Still, they usually spend the winter in Devonshire. But why *should* they let their house, if they don't want to?"

"I have no idea, maze-minded my Johnstone, and this is precisely why I don't feel inclined to interest myself in their suspicions of trouble."

Three months later, at almost the same time in the morning, my cousin, Robin, rang me up. "Clara's consumptive again" he said. "Now we've *got* to go to Switzerland again. I told you I was warned that something like this would happen. Does Hawkes still think I was foolish to ask him to come down and investigate?"

I repeated this message to A.B.C., who pricked up his ears. "Let me speak to him," he said, and I handed

over the instrument. "This is A.B.C. Hawkes speaking," he said. "I read your letter the other week. Do you mind telling me exactly what has happened? When was your wife's previous illness? — Three years ago? — I see. And you say she was completely cured? Who told you that? — Smith-Hills of Harley Street. Yes, he's about the best TB specialist we've got. Yes, if he examined her and said she was cured, you may take it that she was. By the way, did he think she'd be safe from a recurrence if she lived on Leith Hill? — He did. I see. Now, what's this business about a would-be tenant threatening you, or rather, her? — On the telephone, was it? A man's voice, saying that if you wouldn't let your house for the winter on the terms offered to you, your wife would fall ill again so that you'd have to go away? A very accurate prophecy, as you say. When did this happen? Nearly three months ago. — What? Yes, I agree. It's very odd indeed. Do you think you could give Johnstone and me lunch if we come down right away? — I don't know about staying with you, but we'll pack a toothbrush. Good-bye."

By noon we were in sight of my cousin's house, a pleasant old place built of the local yellow stone, high up on the side of one of the valleys leading to the Leith Hill tower.

"As healthy a place for the predisposed consumptive as one could hope to find in England," A.B.C. commented approvingly.

Robin was waiting impatiently for us in the porch. "Thank goodness you've come," he said. "Smith-Hills has just gone, and we're sending Clara up to London this afternoon."

"There's no doubt about the diagnosis?" I asked.

"None whatever. She's got it again — and the devil alone knows how. Smith-Hills says he can't understand it: it had absolutely cleared up when she came back from Switzerland, and there's no reason at all that he can see why she should have gone down with it again, though he agrees that a recurrence often happens."

A.B.C. said, "Did you tell Smith-Hills about the telephone message?"

"He said it must be a coincidence," Robin replied. "I assured him that Clara hadn't consulted anybody else recently. Why, the poor girl was as fit as a fiddle when that fellow rang up."

Just then an eerie screech rang out. "Whatever's that?" I asked.

Robin sighed. "Campers!" he said. "They're a pest in this part of the world: they settle down here in caravans or tents and make more noise than the zoo."

"Do you think that any of them may be concerned in this affair?" I asked. "They would have an opportunity to keep an eye on you, and to notice the change in Clara's health."

"I don't see how they could foresee a recurrence of tubercle," said my cousin, "when it's only in the last few days that Clara's ill-health has been obvious. Otherwise — oh yes, that reminds me. There's a lame fellow who keeps turning up. Do you

see that quite horrible pink caravan just through the hedge there? It's called 'Aintwejolli' — what a name! That caravan's the bane of my life: they shout and sing and play an abominable wireless all evening; they ——"

"Never mind the caravan at the moment," A.B.C. interrupted Robin's tirade. "Tell me about this lame man."

"I don't know, Mr. Hawkes, if it's the same lame man each time, but several curious things have happened lately, and a lame man's been involved in each of them. First of all, the people who wanted to rent this house from me: one of them was lame. At least, there was a lame man who waited outside when the others came in to make me their offer."

"What were they like?" A.B.C. asked.

"The Parkers? Oh, they're just a couple of overdressed profiteers. Bless me, I was forgetting that you don't know that we rented this house to them three years ago when I took Clara to Switzerland. They were excellent tenants in some respects, but they let the garden go to rack and ruin; you never saw such a mess as it was in when we came back. Ghastly!"

"Yes, yes, nature-loving my friend," A.B.C. said testily, "but what about the lame man?"

"Well, when the Parkers called here three months ago and offered to rent the house again, he stayed outside. I couldn't see his face, but evidently he'd something to do with the offer, for, after I'd refused to let to them and they'd gone out, I saw him send 'em back again; and bless me if they didn't raise their offer to twice what they'd paid before. They kept on at me till I told 'em plainly that I didn't intend to have 'em as tenants again. They went away quite calmly, but I saw the lame fellow waving his arms at 'em in an awful paddy when they broke the news."

"And when did you next see him?" A.B.C. asked.

"That's the point; I don't know if it is him. But the parlor-maid came to me a few days later and complained about a lame man in 'Aintwejolli.' She says he was sitting on the steps of the caravan when she passed by the previous afternoon, and invited her to join him in a cup of tea. Only it wasn't tea he gave her; it was port. Being a yokel, she thinks port's non-alcoholic; you can guess what a state she got herself into. She could hardly remember anything, she was so ashamed of herself, but she thinks this lame fellow pumped her with a lot of questions about us."

Hawkes asked if Robin had gone to see if he was the same.

"Yes, I went round, and took the opportunity to complain about the noise their wireless was making. There was only a horrible woman in gray flannel trousers and a yellow knitted jumper there. She jeered at me and said she'd make as much noise as she jolly well liked. I threatened to run her in for creating a nuisance, but she said the local magistrates would never do anything to interfere with campers."

"Not even on behalf of your parlormaid?" I suggested. "I mean, it was hardly right to make her drunk."

A.B.C. sighed. "If all he did to her was to give her a few glasses of port — and I gather that she suffered no other harm — that's scarcely a criminal act, Johnstone," he said. He turned back to my cousin. "Any more lame men? Or reappearances of the same lame man?"

"Yes," Robin replied, "and this was the oddest of all. A few days later I woke up pretty early — you know how a strange noise wakes you in the country — and heard somebody making a queer row outside, as if he was sweeping. It obviously came from the road outside, and at first I didn't take much notice. Then Clara heard me moving about and asked what the matter was. I told her and she said, 'Oh dear! I thought the Council had promised not to put sand down on the roads again.' "

"One minute, Robin," I said. "What's the Council got to do with it?"

My cousin explained. "You see, the Council tars this road at least once a year — goodness knows it needs it — and they used to cover it afterwards with masses of sand, presumably to keep the tar in its place. That was all very well, but they were so confoundedly lavish with their sand that this place was like a miniature Sahara desert for weeks afterwards. The hedges were gray with dust; we had a sandstorm every time a car went by, and Clara complained that she couldn't hope to keep the house clean with the stuff blowing in all the time. So I wrote a letter to the Council and they promised they wouldn't throw any sand down in future, and they didn't — at least not until the morning I'm speaking of.

"Clara and I talked about it for a minute or two; then I threw on a dressing-gown and started downstairs to see if she was right. And, by George, she was. The whole road outside our house was covered with sand, and the wind was beginning to blow it up into the garden and through the windows — just like the old days. I looked out of the gate to see who was putting the stuff down and to tell him to stop. The fellow was a hundred yards away, just getting busy with his shovel on the last sand-heap at the side of the road. I gave a yell, and I'm blessed if he didn't run away! Then I noticed that he dragged one leg a bit. He was lame, but whether he was the same lame man as the other two or whether there were three lame men, I don't know. I couldn't very well chase after him."

A.B.C. cupped his chin in his hand. "I suppose there are a good many lame roadmen round here?" he asked.

"I suppose there are," Robin answered, "but the queer thing is that this fellow wasn't a roadman — at least, the Council foreman assured me that no orders had been given for sand to be chucked down on our road and that none of his workmen had anything to do with it."

I went to the window and looked out, though the yew hedge blocked my view of the roadway. "I didn't notice it specially as we drove up," I remarked.

"You wouldn't," said Robin bitterly. "It's all blown into the house by now, I should think. Anyhow, Mr. Hawkes, the point is that I seem to be surrounded by a collection of lame men who are making a point of annoying me. And I can't help feeling that it's all due to my refusing to let to the Parkers and *their* lame man."

"Maybe," A.B.C. said. "Oh, by the way, when did you get that telephone call threatening your wife?"

"I can tell you exactly," said Robin, picking up a diary from his bureau. "I made a note of it at the time. The Parkers called here three months ago yesterday, and the phone call came a week later."

"I see," said A.B.C. "And what about the lame men's exploits? When were they?"

Robin ruminated. "Well, the celebration with the parlor-maid must have been about the same time as the phone call, and the business with the sand was a few days later."

"You ought to have tried to trace the call," I said.

"I did," said Robin, "and the girl at the exchange was bright enough to remember it. It came from a public call-box on the Guildford road, a couple of miles away. But naturally nobody had seen the chap telephoning."

The gong went for lunch then and, immediately afterwards, poor Clara, looking horribly ill, got into Robin's car to be driven up to town. He was very worried about her and I saw that he wanted to go with her, but equally he didn't want to seem discourteous by leaving us alone.

Hawkes put him out of his misery by insisting that he should accompany his wife. "Johnstone and I are perfectly well able to amuse ourselves in this delightful place," he said to Robin. "In fact, I'm looking forward to admiring your rock-garden." This nearly made Robin stop behind, since he was eager to do the honors of his saxifrages; but at last we bustled him into the car and watched him drive off. There was only a very little sand left on the road, I observed.

"And now, Johnstone, let us put all our facts together — so far as they coalesce," A.B.C. said when we returned indoors.

"There's a lame man wants to rent this house for the winter and appears to have influence over the Parkers who rented it when your cousins were in Switzerland. There's a lame man — the same or another — who shovels unofficial sand over the road and makes your cousin's hedges dusty. And there's a lame man — who may be the same as the others, or the same as one of the others or an entirely different individual — who lives in a caravan with a characteristically horrible name and makes loud noises and gives servant-girls too much port."

"If it's the same man," I said, "it all points to his trying to make the house uninhabitable for Robin."

"It does indeed," A.B.C. agreed.

"And don't forget, A.B.C., that somebody phoned up to say that, if Robin didn't clear out and let his house, Clara would soon be ill again!"

"I'm not in the habit of forgetting such things, good my friend," A.B.C. barked. "Let's begin our investigations by calling on the caravanners, shall we?"

We soon found our way to "Aintwejolli" through a gate in an adjoining field. I have seen some nasty caravans in my time, but never one so horrible as this. It was an old railway-carriage, I should imagine, which had been dumped there on a concrete foundation. A privet hedge had been planted round it and an attempt at a pergola over which some climbing roses trailed. Beside it was a hut, which was evidently used as a garage or cycle shed, for it had a concrete run-in.

"Observe the dummy wheels, Johnstone," said A.B.C. with disgust. "They have obviously been added after the two structures were erected, and are designed to maintain the fiction that these are caravans, that is, movable homes. In this way the owner is spared the inconvenience of paying rates and taxes, and is allowed to make his contribution towards the progressive uglifying of our British countryside. If I had my way, I'd compel every district councillor in Surrey to have a colony of these loathly shacks built directly under his windows, in order to show him what is happening in the districts whose welfare he is supposed to supervise. However, let's get to business." He rapped on the door, and, when there was no answer, tried the handle. "Locked," he said. "Our caravanners are not in residence."

"We could force a window," I suggested.

"Burglarious my Johnstone, I see no necessity for such a measure. The inside of 'Aintwejolli' " — he read out the name from a huge brass plate beside the door — "doesn't interest me. I'm concerned only with meeting lame men, or one lame man, as the case may be. No, I think our next is to drive into Guildford, where you will be kind enough to drop me at the police-station."

I drove him over Newlands Corner and Merrow Down to Guildford and followed him into the police-station, where the sight of his visiting-card created a pleasing atmosphere of helpfulness.

A question about the telephoned threat to Robin seemed to mean nothing to them at first, but finally a man was found who knew about it. He could add nothing to what Robin was told by the girl at the local exchange, namely, that the man had used a public call-box. Nor did they attach any importance to the call, till I mentioned the fact that Robin's wife had indeed been taken ill again, as the telephoner had prophesied.

"Do you suggest that there was a connection between the threat and her illness?" the superintendent asked.

"Not unless the constant annoy-

ance from the caravan and the further annoyance of the sanded road had anything to do with it," I said.

"You can dismiss the caravan as a source of disease," A.B.C. said dryly. "Noise does not create tubercle. Nor does sand — at least, not any sand I've ever known used on roads."

I sat back under this unnecessary snub and listened silently while A.B.C. inquired if the police had any knowledge of a couple named Parker who rented Robin's house for a few months three years before. Some old files were turned up, and it appeared that the Parkers had been charged with keeping a dog without a licence.

A.B.C. grinned cheerfully. "Not a very sinister offence," he commented.

The superintendent laughed. "Oh, that's about all the crime we ever get on Leith Hill. It's the quietest part of our district. Round Guildford we get anything up to murder, and Epsom way can be pretty rough at times, but Leith Hill's a little Sunday school. Isn't it, Timmons? You used to be stationed round there, usen't you?"

"And never likely to forget it, sir," said the sergeant whom he addressed. "Up and down them hills on my bike — more often, *off* it — day and night, and never so much as a burglary to keep me interested. Come to think of it, sir, I remember that dog case. It was just the usual; Mr. Parker, he said he'd left it to the chauffeur to take out the licence, and the chauffeur, *he* said he didn't know nothing about it. It wasn't anything at all, really, but the magistrates fined Mr. Parker a few bob for luck."

"Do you happen to remember what the chauffeur was like?" A.B.C. asked.

"Can't say as I do," said the sergeant. "Wait a bit, though, let's think. Yes, I do an' all. Funny sort of chap he was, grim like, never said a word to nobody, never went to the pub at Friday Street like the others do, sort of stuck-up he was. Course I remember him now. He was lame in one leg, wasn't he?"

"Oho!" cried Hawkes. "Lame, is it? Yes, sergeant, I believe you're right. Now anything more about him, or, rather, *against* him?"

"Not a thing, sir, except I used to meet him all hours of the night, driving that great car of theirs. He never so much as said good day to me, so I ignored him likewise. Nasty-looking chap he was. But still, most chauffeurs are, I've noticed."

"Your bicycling has soured you, sergeant," said A.B.C. And, taking leave of them, we drove back to Robin's house.

"What do you make of it all, A.B.C.?" I asked, as we entered.

"I make nothing at all of it, eager my coz," he replied, "except an unpleasant suspicion that we may be barking up an imaginary tree. What have we got to go on? A queer coincidence — the phone threat and our hostess's relapse so soon afterwards; the anxiety of the Parkers to rent this house again; and a spate of lame men in the neighbourhood. And, of course,

the apparent fact, curious even in these topsy-turvy days, that the Parkers' lame chauffeur, if he was the man who came with them, seems to give them orders instead of taking theirs. I smell mischief, but I don't see it."

And in this unsatisfactory state we spent the rest of the day till Robin came back for dinner, looking a little more cheerful than when he left. Smith-Hills, he said, took a hopeful view of Clara's condition and saw no reason for Robin to worry overmuch.

"Will you have to take her to Switzerland again?" I asked.

"It's too early to say," Robin replied. "Smith-Hills says we must wait for some time before we decide anything for the future."

Just then an appalling row began outside. It was like every cat in the world fighting every dog, to the accompaniment of a mad band. I rushed to the window and threw it open. A light in the window of 'Aintwejolli' through the hedge at the end of the garden made me certain whence the noise came.

"It's the caravan wireless," I shouted — for I had to shout for my words to reach my companions.

"This is the sort of thing I've had to put up with for weeks now," Robin shouted back.

A.B.C. joined me at the window. "To be precise, it's two wireless sets," he said, "receiving different programmes at the same time. Charming form of entertainments!"

"Surely, Robin," I said, "you can run them in for creating a nuisance. Why not phone for the police?"

My cousin shook his head. "You don't know the subtlety of our caravanning friends," he answered. "They'll switch off long before any policeman could get here. And they know that there's no other house near enough to join me in a complaint. There you are!" he said, as the noise stopped as abruptly as it had begun. "They'll lay off for a while now, but they'll start again later on for another few minutes. It's maddening! Confound the brutes! I'd let the house to the Parkers this minute if it wasn't because of my garden."

A maid came in and asked Robin if his gardener might speak to him for a moment; it was something to do with the caravan, she said. Robin excused himself, but A.B.C. suggested that we should have the man in and hear what he had to say. But really he had little to tell: hearing the ghastly row coming from "Aintwejolli," he had taken it on himself to call at the caravan. There was nobody there, he said, except the woman in gray flannel trousers, who had simply shooed him away and told him to mind his own business. But she switched off as soon as he left.

"Did you happen to notice if she limped?" A.B.C. asked.

"No, surr, her didn't limp at arl," the gardener replied. "Not at arl her didn't limp, surr."

"That's one story-book theory destroyed, then," A.B.C. commented. "I did hope for a simple solution."

Nothing happened during the rest of the evening except that twice that diabolical row started again for a few minutes. Just after midnight there was another bout, but the fact that only one programme was involved made Robin thank his stars that most of Europe went to bed early and shut down its wireless stations. Still, I pitied my cousins, who had put up with this misery for so many weeks.

"What's to be done?" Robin asked us in the morning. "I shall have to go to town to see Clara, and I daren't ask you two to stay here much longer. I'm sorry we haven't been able to get any for'arder. I suppose I'll have to move up to town, in which case I might as well let the house."

The telephone rang in the hall and he went to answer it. We heard him give a bellow of fury and ran out, just in time for A.B.C. to snatch the receiver from his hand before he could bang it down.

"It's that confounded Parker!" Robin cried. "Says he's heard my wife's gone away, and will I let him the house *now*?"

A.B.C. raised his hand for silence and spoke into the instrument with unnatural gentleness of tone. "So kind of you to ring up, Mr. Parker," he cooed, "but I'm afraid my host is hardly in a fit state to talk business today. So worried, you know. Tonsillitis can be unpleasant, can't it?"

"Tonsillitis!" Robin exclaimed, but A.B.C. waved him quiet.

"Good heavens, Mr. Parker," Hawkes went on, "whatever makes you think it's consumption the poor lady's suffering from? Tonsillitis, I assure you on my professional reputation. Who am I? I'm the poor lady's doctor just come down to bring her husband the bad news that she'll have to stay in town a few days; then we hope to bring her home again. What? Oh, I can tell you all about *that*. I've given my opinion quite definitely that she mustn't go abroad, not at present anyhow. No, I'm afraid that in the circumstances the house won't be to let yet awhile. You must excuse me now, please; we're all going up to town, and the servants have got the day off, so I must hurry. Awfully kind of you to ring up. Yes, yes, of course, as old tenants of the house, you naturally feel a kind of neighborly interest in the poor lady. Good bye."

Hawkes snapped down the receiver and turned to the goggling Robin.

"Get your servants together, good my host," he said crisply. "Give 'em any excuse you like, but put them in the car and tell your chauffeur to drive them up to town, buy 'em lunch and take 'em to the pictures. The women, anyway. As for the gardener, tell him to take the day — tell him to go to Maidenhead and buy some rhododendrons — anything you like that'll get him away and keep him away. And mind the chauffeur drives slowly and carefully — and along the road leading past the caravan field. There's something in the wind, and I fancy the caravan's mixed up with it. Mr. Parker knew a great deal too much about your wife's departure

and its causes for my liking, and I dare say 'Aintwejolli' is the source of part of his information."

"But I must go to London too," Robin said. "I can't leave Clara."

"To London shall you go, Johnstone's coz! And we shall drive you — to the nearest station, at least."

"Then what?" I asked.

"You'll see," said A.B.C. "Bustle now, cock my Robin, and get those servants out of the house, while Johnstone and I pack our bags. You'd better pack one of yours too."

Robin did not wait. We heard him shout to the maid to fetch the rest of the servants; he told them of the treat they were to enjoy in London, and gave special instructions to the gardener. A quarter of an hour later the maids drove off, slowly and in the direction A.B.C. had suggested. Then Robin came downstairs carrying a suitcase and placed it on our bags in the hall.

"I haven't seen the gardener go yet," A.B.C. remarked. "Do you mind making certain of him?"

Robin wandered off, returning in a few minutes with the news that the gardener had stopped to stoke up the boiler which supplied the hot water for the baths and radiators, but would soon be gone.

"That's one good deed to the Parkers' credit, anyhow," he remarked casually. "When we let 'em the house, there was one of those ghastly contraptions in the kitchen that's supposed to do everything at once — you know, cook the dinner and hot the water. The beastly thing was a curse: I warned the Parkers when they took the house that it never worked unless somebody sat over it all day and stoked it. When we got back from Switzerland, they'd scrapped it and put in a separate boiler for the hot water and an honest-to-goodness kitchen range to cook by. They said their cook wouldn't stay unless they made the change, and they were sure we wouldn't mind. Mind? I was never so pleased in my life. I offered to pay the cost of the job, but they wouldn't hear of it."

"Shades of Prometheus!" cried A.B.C. "Why didn't you tell me this before? It's the very thing I've been looking for, ever since we came here."

"What, the kitchen range?" Robin asked innocently, but A.B.C. laughed.

"All aboard, jolly my boys!" he shouted. "Pack the luggage into the dickey, Johnstone, and hey-ho for London! No time to lose now, if we're to clear this matter up. Ah, there goes your gardener, and, luckily enough, his way leads him past the caravan. All aboard!"

His excitement contrasted with Robin's worried expression and my own puzzlement, but he calmed down as we left the house and drove off in his car. "Anybody near the caravan?" he asked me as we passed the gate of the field where it stood, and he seemed delighted when I told him that a woman in gray flannel trousers was trimming the privet hedge in front of 'Aintwejolli' in plain view of the road.

He stopped the car round the first

bend and put his finger to his lips for silence. After a few moments we heard the noise of a motor-cycle starting up. A.B.C. instantly pressed down the accelerator and we shot off down the lane. We dropped Robin at Dorking Station with all good wishes for his wife's progress and Hawkes drove back at once to the local police-station, leaving me outside.

When he came back, he answered my questions at once. "They've given me a lovely big whistle," he said, "and if I blow it outside your cousin's house any time after half an hour or so from now, at least three lovely big policemen will arrive like babies out of the gooseberry-bushes. And you are going to have a lovely, lovely walk with nursie."

I began to see what was in the wind, and I was not much surprised when he ran the car into a quiet lane a mile or so from Robin's house and bade me get out. We went along cautiously, keeping to the woods and fields and avoiding the road to the house. At last, we saw its chimneys smoking over the firs and A.B.C. pulled me to the ground and put his mouth to my ear.

"Little Johnny going to play Red Indians now with nursie," he whispered. "Little Johnny going to creep on Little Mary till we can keep an eye on Uncle Robin's house and the pretty caravan without nosey Parkers seeing us."

He began to scramble towards the road at full length, taking great care not to make a noise. I followed him, and soon we reached a convenient clump of gorse, through which we could plainly see the wall of the house and the outline of "Aintwejolli."

A.B.C. gasped and, following his pointing finger, I realised that we were not the only people on the spot. Twenty yards away, where one of the sand-heaps had stood which the lame man had shovelled across the road, a squat ungainly hobbledehoy sat over a fire. A bicycle, tied together with string and wire, lay beside him. As I stared, the fellow threw an armful of dry twigs on the fire, which blazed up.

Then I heard voices and the woman in the yellow jumper and flannel trousers ran out of the caravan and approached the man at the fire. Instead of greeting him as an accomplice, as I expected she would do, she threatened him with extravagant gestures, thrusting her fists into his face and making as if to claw at his eyes. The man gave a shrill cry and backed away from her, squealing a protest as she began to stamp out the fire he had made. Her heavy shoes made quick work of it and in a few seconds the fire was dim; but the man still tried to protect it and, picking up handfuls of the ashes as she scattered them, threw them back.

The woman advanced on him again and he stumbled away. Suddenly he moaned and raised his hands towards her like a hurt child; they were scratched and bleeding. Then he made a dash for his bicycle and wheeled it away in a curious lumbering trot.

I saw his face. It was round and moon-like; his eyes were saucers and his lips slobbered. Though he was very near us, I risked whispering in A.B.C.'s ear, "The limping man!"

Hawkes glared at me and drew my ear towards his mouth. "He's only a village idiot, like yourself, Johnstone," he murmured. "Shut up."

As the fellow passed us, he gave a yelp and dropped his bicycle. He rubbed his bleeding hands together with a moan of pain and something dropped from one of them into the road before us, where it lay glittering in the sun. Then he shambled away, his ancient bicycle clattering in every spoke.

The woman waited till he was out of sight and went back to the caravan, disappearing behind the privet hedge that masked its doorway.

Nothing happened for five minutes, until A.B.C. clasped my arm and pointed to the chimneys of Robin's house. I saw a mass of gray smoke pour out from them and gradually die away to nothing. Somebody had put out the fire, presumably by throwing water over it. This was followed by a muffled sound of knocking, and I noticed A.B.C. glance at his watch. He pointed to the minute-hand and to a point ten minutes on and made pretence to blow a whistle. I understood: he was giving the intruders ten minutes more.

Those ten minutes passed very slowly, more slowly than anybody would believe who had not lain there, as I did, behind that clump of gorse with nothing to do but wait and wait. At last the time came. A.B.C. jumped up, blowing his whistle, and immediately half a dozen policemen came running down the road. There was a yell from inside the house and, as we dashed round through the garden, four figures sprang out through a side-door and dashed towards the caravan. One of them ran with a limp. We had found the limping man at last!

"Cut 'em off," A.B.C. shouted to the policemen and tore after the fellow that limped; he cut loose from his companions and scrambled over the fence into the caravan-field. I tackled the woman in flannel trousers and brought her down.

Two other policemen held a man and woman in ordinary clothes, but the fourth was coming back with A.B.C., who was gazing ruefully at a long tear in his frock-coat.

"The limper's got away, Johnstone," he said. "If you listen attentively, you may even hear the noise of his confounded motor-bike. He was too quick for me, limp or no limp."

He looked more cheerful, however, when he saw the other captives. "Mr. and Mrs. Parker, I presume," he said, bowing low to the decently dressed couple, "and friend," he added, with another bow to the virago in flannel trousers. "Let's see what you've been doing in this kitchen, brave my explorers!" He led the way through the open door.

I never saw such a mess as that

kitchen was in. Chunks of plaster lay about; everything was covered in dust, and a heap of smouldering coals lay in the middle of the tiled floor where they had been dragged out of the range. Behind this was a deep hole in the wall beside the flue.

A.B.C. approached it eagerly and, thrusting his hand in, chuckled as he turned to the police. "If one of you will finish the job on which these gentry were engaged, I think we shall find ourselves richly rewarded. There's a metal box imbedded there, which needs only a little more easing to bring it out."

One of the policemen took a chisel which A.B.C. picked off the floor and felt inside the hole. A few seconds later he brought out, as A.B.C. predicted, a small square metal box. A couple of blows with the chisel and its lid flew open.

"Two very handsome strings of pearls," A.B.C. commented, lifting out the contents, "not to mention a packet of diamonds."

"The Beare Green job!" the constable cried.

"About three years ago, officer?" A.B.C. asked.

"However did you know that, sir?" he replied.

"Never mind, sweet my constable," Hawkes disregarded the question. "What's worrying me," he said, "is whether you'll be able to catch that fellow with the limp."

"That oughtn't to be too hard, sir," the man whispered behind an enormous hand. "Birds sing, you know, when they're put in a cage." I felt almost sorry for the Parkers and their regrettable friend.

A.B.C. said nothing till we reached our car again where he parked it. "The man with a limp will get a pretty heavy penalty for attempted murder," he remarked, "and I hope for your cousin's sake, if not for his, that it doesn't turn out to be murder."

"I don't understand," I said.

"It was that poor village idiot who put me on the scent," he went on. "You saw his bleeding hands, and the fragment of glass that he brushed from them just beside us?"

"It was glass, was it?"

"Yes, glass. And evidently it was as much of a surprise to him to find his hands full of bits of glass as it was to me. But, being a little brighter than he, I began to suspect how it got there. Silica, good my Johnstone, silica!"

I shook my head in bewilderment.

"Silica is a curious mineral, Johnstone. It has two properties among others which have a bearing on this present case: first, when a fire is lit over it — as the idiot proved with his blood when he snatched up the ashes of the blaze he'd lit over the site of the supposed sand-heap — it turns to glass. And secondly, which explains how it got there, it is practically certain to re-activate tubercle in persons into whose lungs, previously infected, it penetrates. Now do you understand what it was that our lame friend shovelled over the road outside your cousin's house? Silica, just silica, and a very effective means

it was to persuade your cousin to let his house to the Parkers. You know, of course, why they wanted it so badly."

"I'm blessed if I do," I said.

"It's so obvious. The Parkers and their accomplices — that is, the lame man, who is clearly their leader, and the woman in trousers — used this house as their headquarters for burglaries when they rented it from your cousin three years ago. I expect we shall find out that it wasn't convenient for them to try to sell those unusually valuable jewels too soon after they were stolen, and therefore they decided to cache them in this house, taking advantage of their cook's irritation at the cooking apparatus to wall them up without exciting your cousin's suspicion when he came back from Switzerland. It was certainly an ingenious hiding-place, and the safest they could possibly devise.

"This year they decided to collect the jewels and put them on the market. Knowing that your cousin usually lets his house for the winter months, they assumed that he would accept their very advantageous offer. They didn't know how angry their neglect of his garden had made him. As we know, he refused to have them as tenants on any terms, nor did the telephoned threat move him. But they were persistent house-hunters, and decided on more drastic measures, none other than to make his wife ill again with the silica dust. The caravan served two purposes — as a constant source of annoyance to him and as a look-out. That's everything, isn't it, receptive my Johnstone?"

"Everything except catching the lame man," I replied. "Which may not be so easy."

I was right in this. A week later, our door-bell rang and a Scotland Yard friend of A.B.C.'s told us, with some asperity, that they suspected that the lame man had got into touch with a prominent bone-setter — or osteopath, as he preferred to call himself — and was probably now in a nursing-home after an operation to remove his limp.

"You see the idea, A.B.C.?" our visitor went on. "If he comes out without his limp, it's going to make it very much harder for us to link him up with the robbery and the Parkers. They won't talk, blast them!"

A.B.C. smiled. "I shouldn't let it worry you too much," he told our friend. "Smith-Hills told me the other day — oh, you'll be glad to learn that Johnstone's cousin's wife is going on nicely — that four of the fattest Harley Street practitioners he knows make their money almost exclusively by treating the unfortunate victims of this osteopath's strong right arm. The newspapers frequently print the tributes of his more successful and neurotic cases, but it's only Harley Street that knows his real value to the medical profession. Take it from me, sweet coz, our lame friend will in all probability leave that nursing-home with a far worse limp than when he entered it. And serve him jolly well right! 'Aintwejolli,' as he'd say."

PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Well, dear readers, the title of A. H. Z. Carr's latest prize-winning story is almost self-explanatory — "A Case of Catnapping." Could you think of a more whimsical detective-story idea? — the kidnapping of a cat! Out of this unusual conception Mr. Carr fashions a warm and delightful reading experience. You do not have to have an affinity for pets in general, or for cats in particular, to enjoy Mr. Carr's tale to the fullest; but surely no one who has ever kept a pet will fail to be moved, or will fail to succumb — hook, line, and sinker — to the charm of this story.

Meet the irresistible Dizzy . . . and have yourself a glamorous gumshoe gambol in the always fascinating show business . . .

A CASE OF CATNAPPING

by A. H. Z. CARR

THE BIGGEST FEE I EVER GOT WAS for finding a cat. That's the way it goes. I have solved murders and traced stolen jewels, but the only time anybody ever paid me 5,000 smackers, it was for a cat. I grant you, not an ordinary cat. This was the great Dizzy.

The funny part of it was that before there was even a case, the wife and I had been to the Orpheum just to see that act. *Dizzy — the World's First Performing Cat — With Dave Knight* — that's the way they billed it. My wife is a nut about cats — we have two of our own — and when she saw this publicity story in the newspaper, she read it to me.

It told how this Dave Knight had been a small-time entertainer, with a corny routine of comedy, tap-dancing, and ventriloquism — not very good at any of them, and pretty near down and out — when one night on the street this kitten rubs against his leg. It is just a handful of skin, bones, fleas, and miaows, and he does not care much about cats, but he says, "O.K., some milk," puts her in his pocket, and takes her to his little walk-up apartment in Greenwich Village. He feeds her and cleans her up, and the next thing you know, he has a cat, for he cannot bring himself to kick her out.

She turns out to be a kind of genius — as smart as any trained dog or chimpanzee — smarter, even. The article tells how Knight named her Dizzy when he noticed her doing somersaults while she played with a piece of string. Little by little he

taught her tricks, until she would do them even on a stage and was not frightened by the lights and noise, as long as Knight was there.

Vaudeville was coming back just then, and when the booking agents looked over the act, they realized it was something new. Knight and Dizzy crashed the big time, touring all over the country. It says in the article there are supposed to be ten million house cats in the world, but Dizzy is unique — the only cat that ever got into the upper tax brackets. A thousand a week Knight was making, and he had Dizzy's life insured for $100,000.

The wife said she had to see it before she would believe it, and the next thing I knew we had our coats on and were headed for the Orpheum. We came in during an act called *The Three Graces — and the Disgrace* (a comedy dance team, and good too) — three girls, one a redhead, one a blonde, and the third a brunette, and a guy with a very funny dance routine. Next was *McIntyre, the Irish Magician*, who had a midget dressed as a leprechaun, and who did a lot of neat magic — mind-reading, card tricks, sword tricks, disappearances — the works. But it was Dizzy that wowed the audience.

Quite a cat. She had long silky gray fur, crossed with tigerish black stripes, a white bib and ruff, white boots, and a tail like a silver fox. Then there was her face. Most cats look pretty much alike, but this one had big golden eyes, long white whiskers, and an eager, innocent, gentle expression that made my wife coo.

She was the whole act. Knight is just a freckle-faced kid with a friendly grin — the college type, with a crew-cut and glasses — and smart enough not to compete with Dizzy. He started very easy, making her sit up, lie down, and play dead, like a dog. Anything a dog could do, he said, Dizzy could do better. She stood on her hind legs, with little boxing gloves on her front paws, and hit a little punching bag that he rigged up, in time to music. Then she did a series of somersaults and back flips, and jumped through three moving hoops. The orchestra played a rhumba, and they did a dance — very cute — with Knight tapping, and Dizzy moving around on her hind legs, with a little wiggle that made the audience roar.

The ventriloquist stunt was good, too. She sat on his knee, like a dummy, and he made her seem to speak in a high-pitched, miaowing voice, opening and shutting her mouth at the same time. At the end of the act he set up a contraption that looked like a little xylophone, with thin strips of metal hanging down loose. When she would hit one of these strips with her paw, it struck a note; and believe it or not, she jumps around, bangs the strips, and out comes *Home, Sweet Home.*

The audience loved it, and my wife couldn't talk about anything else for a week. So when my phone rings next Sunday morning and a fellow says, "Are you Jack Terry? This is Dave

Knight," I knew who he was. He said the manager of the Orpheum — Eddie Thompson, who I went to school with — had suggested that he get in touch with me, and could he see me right away.

I told him sure, meet me at my office. When he showed up, there was a girl with him, and he introduced her as Miss Maribeth Lewis. I recognized her — one of The Three Graces — the dark-haired one. Very young, with one of these wide-mouthed, attractive faces, and a figure right out of a dream, as I knew from seeing her on the stage. Both of them were looking pale and worried, and Knight got right down to business.

"Dizzy is gone," he said. "I want you to find her."

"Look," I said. "I'm a detective, just an ordinary private eye, as they call them on TV. What you want is the SPCA or something. I'm sorry your cat is gone, but I wouldn't know how to begin to find a cat."

Knight was no dope. He did not argue. He just said, "I will pay you five thousand dollars if you find her. That's every cent I have saved so far, but you can have it."

"That's a lot of money," I said. "But suppose she has been hit by a truck or something."

Knight looked like *he* had been hit by the truck, and the girl, Maribeth, said, "Please don't say that, Mr. Terry!"

"Look," I said, "I don't want to scare you, but you know how it is when a cat is loose on city streets, with the traffic and all. Anything can happen. Besides, it isn't like she would be a total loss. How about that hundred grand you get if she is dead?"

"You don't understand," said Knight. "That cat is part of me. I wouldn't sell her for a million bucks. As far as the insurance goes, it only covers death under certain conditions. It does not apply if she is lost."

"Is she lost?"

"I don't know. I can't understand it." He kept running his hand through his thatch of sandy hair. "You don't know how I watch over that cat. She is hardly ever out of my sight. She sleeps in my bed, and we even eat together."

"Maybe she's just taking a day off," I said, trying to encourage him. "We've got a female cat, and she likes to go out on the town now and then."

"Dizzy has never done that," said Knight, shaking his head.

I said, "Have you thought about offering a reward?"

"There is a tag on Dizzy's collar," he explained, "giving my name and offering five hundred dollars to anyone who finds her if she is lost and returns her to me or to the police. And I have checked with the police — they are keeping a lookout for her."

I had been sizing him up. He did not strike me as the type who would get rid of his cat for the insurance. I knew my wife would never forgive me if I did not try to find Dizzy for him, so although I was not hopeful, I said, "Let's leave it like this. If I find her alive and in good shape, we can talk

about a bonus. If she is dead, I get only my regular fee and expenses. Okay? Now tell me exactly what happened. How did you lose her?"

Knight said, "It was last night, in the theater. I was waiting in the wings for McIntyre the Magician to finish. I always stand there for maybe ten minutes before I go on, with Dizzy in my arms, so she can get used to the noise and lights."

He was pretty emotional, you could tell, but he gave me the facts straight and fast. "Then Barton — that's Bill Barton, he's the Disgrace in Maribeth's act — he called to me. He wanted to show me a loose piece of rope that was hanging down just over where Dizzy does her hoop act. He was afraid it might make her nervous. You couldn't see it from where I was standing, so I put Dizzy in her box, and walked back to where Bill was."

"Wait a second. Did you leave the box open?"

"No, I latched it. It is really a big leather traveling case that I had specially built for her. She couldn't get out. Not unless somebody opened the box."

"Then somebody did," I said. "Well, go on."

"Bill was right. The rope was swaying just enough so it might have distracted Dizzy. I went after a stagehand and got him to go up and pull the rope out of the way."

"If you were on the stage," I said, "how come the audience couldn't see you?"

"McIntyre does the first part of his act before a close backdrop. I was behind the backdrop."

"How long were you away from Dizzy's box, all told?" I asked him.

"Not more than three minutes. At first I thought maybe some busybody had unlatched the box to look at her."

Maribeth said, "People are always trying to pet her."

"But," said Knight, "if Dizzy had jumped out of the box, she would have come to me. She always does. She just wasn't around. We searched everywhere — backstage, the wings, the dressing rooms. I called to her — she always comes running when I call, but she didn't show up. After McIntyre finished his act, I had to tell Mr. Thompson I couldn't go on. He explained to the audience what had happened, and asked them to let us know if any of them saw the cat — thinking it might have got out front somehow. But nobody had seen it."

I said, "You figure she was taken out of the box deliberately — stolen, is that it?"

"That's what must have happened," Knight said. "But who would do a thing like that? Everybody in the theater loves that cat, and is my friend. And where could they have hidden her? How could they have got her out of the theater without somebody noticing? It just doesn't make sense."

I chewed that over for a minute, and then I said, "Excuse me for getting personal — but did you and Miss Lewis just happen to come here at the same time?"

They looked at each other, and Knight said, "It's no secret. We're engaged. At least —" He stopped.

"Dave!" said Maribeth. "You know perfectly well we could make out." She turned to me. "We're going to get married when we finish our current bookings. But now he keeps saying that without Dizzy he doesn't amount to anything in the profession, and he has no right to ask me to team up with him. As if a cat — even Dizzy — should be allowed to decide how people should live their lives. Isn't that ridiculous, Mr. Terry?"

"Ridiculous," I agreed, looking her over — a really sumptuous dish. "How long have you known each other?"

"Oh," she said, "for several months. We have been traveling on the same circuit. It was in New Orleans that we really knew — wasn't it, darling?"

Knight nods, and says, "Yesterday the world looked wonderful. Today —" He didn't finish.

"Well," I said, "let me think aloud for a minute, and don't hold it against me if I say something wrong. I'm just groping, you understand. You really love that cat, don't you? You think about her as if she was human."

"She is practically human. Of course I love her."

I put a cigar in my mouth, and lighted it, thinking hard. Then I said, "My wife once made me read a novel by a Frenchwoman — Colette, her name was — where a dame is so jealous of her husband's cat that she tries to kill it."

A second went by before Knight reacted. Then he exploded. "I thought you had some sense. You're crazy!"

But it was Maribeth I was watching. Her big, dark eyes flashed, but she only said, very quiet, "Mr. Terry, you're wrong. I love Dizzy, and I love Dave, and I'm not a murderess — or a kidnapper."

"Just testing," I said. I figured she was O.K. A woman who would consider killing a cat murder wouldn't kill it — or kidnap it. "Excuse it, please. Now let's get back to the facts. Knight, when you were standing in the wings with Dizzy, did you see anyone hanging around?"

"Not a soul. Nobody came near us."

"After you told the stagehand to take care of the rope, you went back to the box. You still didn't see anybody nearby?"

He shook his head.

"Everybody was backstage. They were just lifting the backdrop for the last part of McIntyre's act. The only person I could see from where I stood was McIntyre."

Something clicked in my mind. "How about the midget? The leprechaun? Doesn't he go offstage a couple of times?"

"Little Pat? Wait. You're right. He does go off once or twice to bring in little props for McIntyre. I suppose he must have passed Dizzy's box a couple of times. I guess I was so used to him, I didn't pay any attention."

"But surely," said Maribeth, "Pat wouldn't steal the cat."

This seemed like a good chance to

make like Sherlock Holmes, which always impresses the clients, so I said, "When you have eliminated the impossible, that which remains — no matter how improbable — must be the truth. The way I see it, Pat the midget is it. He was near the cat's box. He could have stooped down, unlatched the box, and taken the cat out."

"But what would he have done with it?" Knight said. "He had to be back on stage in a minute."

I cleared my throat — for my big idea. "Doesn't McIntyre put the leprechaun in a cabinet and make him disappear, the last part of his act?"

Knight jerked up straight. "You're right!" he said.

"Look at the facts. You are off looking for a stagehand. The cabinet that McIntyre uses for the disappearance trick is behind the backdrop — out of sight of the audience, and out of your sight, too. Nobody is around. It probably wouldn't take Pat more than a couple of seconds to carry the cat to the cabinet and put her inside. Let's say he knows how to work the trick. The cat disappears. Then he simply picks up his prop and goes on stage again with McIntyre."

Maribeth said, "But in that case, wouldn't Dizzy have come out when McIntyre opened the cabinet?"

Knight jumped to his feet. "No, that trick is just a new version of an old gag — works with a trapdoor. I've seen it. The trap goes down to a room in the basement. That's what must have happened!"

He was starting for the door. "Take it easy," I said. "Do you know where we could find the midget now?"

"I saw him in the hotel this morning," said Maribeth. "And — oh! I just thought of something. He had a piece of sticking plaster on his face. I thought he had cut himself shaving."

"That does it," I said. "Let's go."

"The hell with the midget," said Knight. "Let's find Dizzy. She may still be down in that basement."

I agreed we should go to the theater first, and we piled into my car. There was a watchman on duty at the theater, and he let us in. Knight was so impatient he wanted to run. Right under the stage there was a big room with several ladders leading to trapdoors above. It was empty, though.

There was one window in the room, at the back, and it was open. Knight swore and looked sick. "She could have got out that way," he said.

The window opened on a narrow alley. We went out there and walked up and down, while Knight called, "Dizzy! Dizzy, baby!" No use. Not a sign of a cat. "This is terrible," he said. "Somebody must have taken her away. If she was loose, she would still be here. She has a wonderful homing sense."

I said, "Let's go to the hotel. I want to talk to the little leprechaun."

We found Pat in the Coffee Shop of the hotel, having lunch alone. Steak, no less. He was only about three feet high, and dressed very dapper. Sure enough, he had a big piece of adhesive on his face.

I didn't waste any time. "Pat," I said, "what's under the plaster?"

He turned pale and said in his piping voice, "A cut. I cut myself."

"Mind if I look?" I said.

He tried to get away, but Knight held him, and I pulled off the tape. There was no mistaking the marks — three short parallel scratches, deep enough to draw blood. Dizzy was evidently a lady who didn't like to be roughhoused.

At first, Pat clammed up — wouldn't say a word. So, sitting there at the luncheon table, I reconstructed what must have happened — everything he had done, step by step. "You don't even have to tell us who put you up to it," I said.

"McIntyre," Knight said, real grim.

"No," I said. "Your friend Bill Barton. How much did he pay you, Pat?"

The midget called Barton several words, and said, "He talked!"

Maribeth and Knight looked stunned. She said, "I can't believe it."

"Obvious, my dear Watson," I said, "from the first. Barton got Knight out of the way with that prearranged business about the rope while Pat made the snatch. And Barton has a motive. If you marry Knight, you break up his act. And maybe," I added, "he has other ideas about who you ought to marry, Miss Lewis."

Her face showed she thought I was right.

"He said," squeaked the midget, opening up at last and talking to Knight, "he just wanted to keep the cat for a little while to get you out of his hair. So you couldn't finish your bookings. He thought if Maribeth didn't see you for a while, he might be able to beat your time."

"We'll see you later," I told the midget. "Enjoy your ill-gotten steak while you can. Do you know the penalty for kidnapping? And don't try to tell me it was only catnapping."

We had Maribeth call Barton on the hotel house-phone to make sure he was in his room. She didn't say we were with her. When he opened his door to her knock and saw the three of us, he didn't like it. On stage, he had been made up as a bum, but standing there in his dressing gown he looked very distinguished — one of the tall, dark, and handsome boys.

Knight didn't stand on ceremony. He pushed Barton into a chair and stood over him, yelling, "You skunk, give me back my cat or I'll break your neck."

It took Barton only a few seconds to realize there was no use trying to lie out of it. Either he delivered the cat, I told him, or we would put him behind bars. That reached him. "I haven't got her," he said. "Believe me, I haven't. It was just a wild impulse. I'm in love with Maribeth, too. And I had to try to protect my act. You know the old saying — all's fair in love and war."

I hate guys who talk like that. "All right," I said, "then this is war." With that I cuffed him, hard, on the side of his head. "Spill it," I said. "Where's the cat?"

He rubbed his head and said, "She got away."

"What do you mean she got away?" Knight shouted.

Barton told us that after Pat had dropped the cat through the trapdoor under the magic cabinet, and Knight had gone to look for a stagehand, he had rushed down to the basement to get Dizzy. It was his idea to smuggle her out of the theater and keep her somewhere for a while. But she wasn't there. Somebody had left the basement window open, and she had got out. He had never seen her.

I believed him, and so did Knight, who started running his hand through his hair again. "Something must have happened to her," he groaned. "Otherwise she would have been reported by now."

Maribeth said, "Oh, Dave, darling," and he put his arms around her. I thought that was a good moment to give Barton a brief description of his ancestry and his future. Then we left him sitting there, crushed, and went back to the theater. I asked Knight again about his insurance policy. The way it was written, the company wasn't responsible if the cat was stolen or ran away while unguarded. Technically, that was what had happened, so it didn't seem as if Knight had a chance to collect. The only thing that could help him was to find Dizzy — pronto.

I didn't see much that I could do, but I felt I ought to try to earn my day's pay. When we reached the alleyway next to the theater, I stopped and said, "What we need now is psychology — cat psychology. Where would a cat go that jumped out of that basement window? I am assuming Dizzy is alive and able to navigate. Then she must be at a place where she is out of sight — because otherwise someone would have found her and brought her back for the reward. And it is probably a place that she likes — because otherwise she would have tried to come back to the theater and to Knight."

Knight nodded. "Yes," he said. "That makes sense." He was so eager to hope, it was pathetic.

"Now," I said, "what is it that would attract a cat like Dizzy so much that she would be content to stay away?"

"Could it be food?" Maribeth said.

"No," said Knight. "She is a dainty eater, and always gets her meals on schedule, and she never lets anybody else feed her. You couldn't keep her away just with food — not even caviar, which she loves."

"Look," I said. "She may have aristocratic tastes, but she is still a cat. What is the main interest of a female cat — especially one that has never had a boy friend?"

"Of course!" Maribeth said. "I bet that's it."

"I don't believe it," said Dave.

"You're just jealous," said Maribeth. "What could be more natural? I'm female myself. I know."

"Tomcats like alleys," I pointed out. "And if they are off somewhere holding paws, that would explain why

nobody has seen her. I have noticed that cats like to keep to themselves at such times."

"But that would be ruinous!" said Knight.

"What's so terrible about it? It goes on all the time," I said.

"You don't understand," he said. "I had a talk with a cat authority about it. He said Dizzy's unusual intelligence shows that the ordinary cat instincts are not fully developed in her. He said if she were to — uh — have an affair with a male cat, she would probably revert to type, and then would not respond to me the way she does now."

"Maybe not," I said. "But you still want to find her, don't you?"

"Of course I do. Even if she never acts again, I've got to find her," he said.

"Then my hunch," I said, "I mean my deduction, is to look for a tomcat. And where would you be likely to find a tomcat in a business section like this? There are no homes around here. And stray cats do not often come into streets full of traffic. No — the chances are that any cat you would see in this alley comes from some store or restaurant."

I looked down the alley. A few buildings beyond the theater was a door with a few crates stacked outside. "We'll start there," I said.

It was the back door of a restaurant called The Rendezvous. "This is the most likely place," I said, "because it's the closest. Let's go around front."

I got hold of the proprietor — a fat, friendly Italian named Pirelli — and asked him if he had a cat.

"Yes," he said, looking around. "Somewhere. Maybe in the kitchen. Maybe in the cellar. Maybe outside. He comes. He goes. What do you want with my cat?"

I said, "Look. This is important. We are trying to find a girl-cat who has got lost. We have an idea that she may be hiding out with some tomcat in this neighborhood. Could we look around your place for your cat, just in case the other one has sneaked in here too?"

When Pirelli got the idea, he laughed, and said, "Why, sure. My cat, Tommy, he is a great one with the ladies. You should hear the noise sometimes in the alley. Go ahead, look. I will go with you."

Tommy wasn't in the dining room or the kitchen. "Only one other place," Pirelli said. "Maybe down cellar."

Down cellar we went. When he switched on a light, we heard a miaow. Out from behind some barrels came a big, black, tough-looking tom, and rubbed against Pirelli's legs. Pirelli said, "Hello, Tommy. You got a lady friend down here, maybe?"

The tomcat looked at him and miaowed deeply. From behind the barrels came another, more musical miaow, and Dave Knight yelled, "Dizzy!"

There she was, stretched out on an old piece of burlap. Knight picked her up and kissed her, and Maribeth

made a big fuss over her, too. They both told me I was the greatest detective in the world, which is probably an exaggeration, and Pirelli congratulated us, while the tomcat and Dizzy miaowed. All of a sudden, Dizzy jumped out of Knight's arms, went to the tom, and rubbed against him.

"Aha!" said Pirelli. "You see? He is a great one with the ladies, that Tommy."

It was pretty plain that Dizzy thought so, too. When Knight reached for her, she drew back and spat at him. He stared at her in horror. Then she touched noses with Tommy. He licked himself, the way cats do when they are embarrassed by people looking at them. Finally, Dizzy turned around three times, and lay down on her side, stretching out her paws, purring like a little steam engine, and looking at Tommy with big, soulful eyes.

Knight looked absolutely crushed, and I didn't blame him. Dizzy had ceased to be a trained performing cat. She was just a female in love, and nobody could come between her and her mate — not even the man she had been sleeping with.

Maribeth said, "Dave, perhaps if the tom came along."

His face lighted up. "That's an idea," he said. "Mr. Pirelli, will you sell me your cat?"

Pirelli did not like it and held out for a while, but $25 finally convinced him. We got a big box, put both cats into it, loaded it into a taxi, and got it up to Knight's apartment in the hotel. The cats didn't seem to mind — they were so wrapped up in each other, a mere change of residence hardly mattered. Knight looked at the tom the way an outraged father might look at the scoundrel who has seduced his daughter, but what could he do?

What he wanted to know, of course, was whether Dizzy would do her tricks. He played a recording and tried to get her to dance and jump through a hoop, but all she did was turn her back, miaow, and sidle up to Tommy. When we put the tom out of the room, she scratched at the door and yelled until we had to let him in again.

Knight gave up. "Well," he said, "I have lost my meal ticket, but anyway, I've got my cat back."

"You have got your girl, too, in case you have forgotten," said Maribeth. "And don't think you can shake me with any excuse about poverty. Look at Dizzy and Tommy. You don't see them worrying about the future, do you?"

Knight kissed her. Finally I coughed and said, "Well, I guess the case is closed. I'll be going along."

They remembered me then, and began to shake my hand and thank me. Knight said, "About that five thousand. You've earned it. I haven't got it all in the bank, but I'll give you a check for a thousand right now, and the rest in a couple of days. Okay?"

"No," I said. "Forget it. What kind of a heel do you think I am? If Dizzy was still worth a thousand a week to

you it might be different. This way, you will be needing all the money you have. This has been good fun, and you owe me exactly one day's pay — fifty dollars. The other four thousand, nine hundred and fifty is my wedding present to the two of you. Now don't argue about it!"

And that's the way we left it. When I asked Knight what he wanted to do about Barton and the midget, he said, "What's the use of making trouble? Their punishment won't get Dizzy to perform again — and the publicity would hurt McIntyre and Maribeth's sisters, who are innocent."

He was a good kid. So was Maribeth. They went to New York to try to work up a husband-and-wife act, and I didn't hear from them for more than two months. Then a postcard came from Maribeth, saying they were happy, and still hopeful of getting somewhere with their act. Also, Dizzy had produced six adorable kittens — three like herself, two like Tommy, and one white one that they couldn't account for. They had named the white one Terry, after me.

She sounded as if they were having a struggle, but not minding it too much. A few more months went by. Then, just yesterday, I got a letter from them. When I opened it, a check fell out. It was for $4,950. The letter said:

About this check. It is not your wedding present to us. No, we have been living on that, and blessing you for it. This is something else again. It is what we owe you, according to our original agreement, and if we did not pay it we would never feel right. So please take it — because we can afford it now. Besides, our agent says we can charge it off on our income tax.

You see, some time back we went into the little room where Dizzy was playing with her kittens. There she was, turning somersaults again. And then it happened. *One after another, all of the kittens turned somersaults, too!*

Inherited aptitude, they call it. We spent endless hours making sure, and training them. Today we signed a contract, with a big advance, for a full season's bookings and movie and television appearances. Fifteen hundred a week. We're going to be rich.

We open at the Palace. The act is terrific. We have got a trapeze number with all six kittens flying through the air at the same time while Dizzy stands there like a ringmaster, with a little whip in her paw. There is no doubt about it. Every one of those kittens is a genius, just like Dizzy. Tommy, of course, is not in the act. But he does not have to do tricks. He has other gifts.

We're billed as *Those Wonderful Cats — and the Knights.* When we come your way, there will be tickets at the box office for you and Mrs. Terry. Bless you.

Love from Dave, Maribeth, Dizzy, Tommy, and The Six.

My wife can hardly wait to see the act. As a matter of fact, neither can I.

In the mood for a horror story? A horror story the like of which you have never read before? A particularly nasty horror story about a particularly nasty man — and with a tremendous last line . . . by the famous newspaperman and novelist, best known for his DEATH IN THE DEEP SOUTH.

BOY FOR TEA

by WARD GREENE

"THE ONE OBJECTION TO BENJAMIN," said Mr. Shiveley, pondering the little cakes Mrs. Dennison offered, "the one objection to Benjamin was his ambition. It made him both egocentric and sweaty, and that's rather hard on other people. You'll forgive my speaking plainly — there's no story without it and you must have the story, it's the sort of thing you do so well — Benjamin was one of the great unwashed. And, being ambitious, he never knew it. No, thank you, Mrs. Dennison, but I will have another of those olives."

For a moment Mr. Shiveley inspected critically the morsel impaled in its jacket of crisp bacon on the end of a toothpick. He popped it into his mouth with frank gusto. One could always be sure of something good at Mrs. Dennison's. Exceptional person for a lady author.

"Of course," said Mr. Shiveley, "I know all little boys are apt to be that way. One notices it in schoolrooms and so on. It would be unnatural if they weren't, wouldn't it? They can't help it, I suppose — tearing about and all that." Twinkles skittered behind Mr. Shiveley's noseglasses. "I daresay," he added, "that *I* was no rosebud as a little boy."

Mrs. Dennison bleakly hoped that Mr. Shiveley was not going to be ingenuous. It was one of his charm moods, invariably heralding the expression of a naughtiness. He could be especially ingenuously charming, and naughty, on the subject of Shiveley, the little boy, and Mrs. Dennison detested it — nothing, she had decided lately, was duller than naïve autobiography.

She suggested a highball to divert him; Mr. Shiveley had had but one and was not likely to be very ingenuous before three.

"But Benjamin," said Mr. Shiveley, taking the glass, "wasn't a little boy. He was nearly twenty and there was no excuse for him. The devil of it was we could do nothing about it.

"You see, he'd been with the office five years, and besides, he wasn't the type you could mention such a thing to. Horribly serious! Horribly ambitious too — night school, Schopen-

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hauer, German and Italian movies — you know the sort. He subscribed to *Le Rire* — to help his French, I suppose, for he couldn't have seen anything funny in it. I never heard him laugh. Appallingly thorough! — except about the hygiene. But not a smile, mind you. You can understand that his best friend" — Mr. Shiveley twinkled — "wouldn't tell him.

"Well," continued Mr. Shiveley, "it didn't matter for quite a long while. We're a busy place and nobody pays much attention to office boys. Benjamin was out most of the day on errands, and the rest of the time he hunched over a book in some corner. 'Benjamin!' one called — it's significant that we never called him 'Ben' — and then, 'Cigarettes!' One didn't even look up. One felt him there and put down a quarter, and before long cigarettes appeared. I suppose the — odor of ambition, as it were — announced his presence, but I give you my word I didn't notice it — or Benjamin, for that matter — for years. You know how it is when one is working — absorbed?"

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Dennison.

Mr. Shiveley sipped his highball appreciatively; it was excellent liquor.

"I noticed it first — this arresting quality about Benjamin, I might call it — some months ago. He stopped at my desk, solemnly waiting till I looked up. It was the usual business of a raise, and of course I listened; one wishes to be fair about these things, even to office boys. Besides, they get glum and quit if you're not. Benjamin had had a raise three years before and was making twenty-eight a week, I think it was, which is high for office boys, I can tell you. I explained that fact, kindly, explained that his job — but I won't bore you with trivia. . . . The fact was he'd grown up but his job hadn't. Benjamin was too old to be an office boy. And then he rather startled me. Said he knew it, said he wanted to write, said that's why he took a job with us, wanted to know if I wouldn't let him do book reviews. Imagine it! — the office boy! — book reviews for us! Absolutely characteristic of Benjamin — he was frightfully ambitious — but quite preposterous, of course. So I told him I'd think it over — one wishes to seem sympathetic. The point is that looking at him — talking to him — seeing him as a person, d'you see? — I noticed that Benjamin's presence was not pleasant to me.

"It wasn't repulsive," said Mr. Shiveley, meditatively, rattling his ice. "The merest suggestion, one might say. Not actually offensive, to be strictly accurate. I've noticed the same thing at dances — those metal cloth gowns, perhaps — you know?"

"I think so," said Mrs. Dennison. "Another olive?"

"Thanks," said Mr. Shiveley.

"After that," he continued, "I was uncomfortably aware of Benjamin at times, though I can't say honestly whether it was the other thing or knowing he wanted a raise. I'm too damned tender about people's feelings. I was sorry for him, but there

was nothing I could do. If he wanted to get ahead, why didn't he hunt for another job? Our office is no place for beginners. . . . Newspaper work, or something along that line. Felt himself above it, I daresay — you've no idea how serious he was. Or how tremendously ambitious. One would have thought . . .

"But never mind. The point is that for all that I'm pretty busy, I had Benjamin on my conscience, and when the opportunity came I promoted him."

"Promoted him?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Shiveley. "Not to the book reviews, my dear Mrs. Dennison — don't be alarmed! But we keep a little clipping department at the office — oh, quite a small one — with two people, Miss Tripp and her assistant. An exceptional person, Miss Tripp — we really couldn't get along without her. Her work is her religion; she is positively ferocious if one misplaces a single item out of her files. In all else, the mildest of women.

"Well, Miss Tripp's assistant quit to get married and I gave the job to Benjamin. Poor Benjamin! He was most grateful. The job paid him five dollars a week more, but except for the extra money he was really no better off. In fact, not so well. For you can depend on it that Miss Tripp was no easy master. He had no time for his *Le Rires*, clipping and filing all day long. Oh, she kept him tearing about! Still, Benjamin was encouraged. And he was off my conscience.

"That was a month ago, in July. And now I come to the meat of my story."

Mr. Shiveley began a gesture of protest as Mrs. Dennison tentatively lifted the ice tongs.

"If I must, then — but a very little. . . .

"Miss Tripp and I, you understand, are the best of friends, but I suppose I never said six words to her in my life outside office matters. Ours is a busy place and Miss Tripp is efficiency itself. Very timid. Always reminds me of the White Rabbit — you know — Alice?"

Mrs. Dennison nodded.

"You can see, then, that I was curious when she came to me at the end of the day and asked if she could speak to me privately. This was soon after Benjamin got his promotion. I noticed that Miss Tripp seemed nervous and looked pale and tired. But that wasn't unusual — she's the tired, frail type. The unusualness was in wanting to speak to me.

"We stood in the corridor and after some stammering and hand-twisting, she got it out. She'd remembered ages ago we had a stenographer who rouged too much, a walking chromo, and — I assure you this was nonsense, mere silly spoofing on my part! — at any rate, she thought I'd influenced this girl. Perhaps she did slap the warpaint on a bit less after I'd rallied her about it. And she — Miss Tripp — wanted to know if I wouldn't use my influence — what d'you suppose — to reform Benjamin!

"Facetious? Not at all! You don't know Miss Tripp — or Benjamin. I could see she was very much in earnest and painfully aware that the subject was delicate — or indelicate, as you choose. She plumped right out with it and no explanations. She saw I understood without them. Benjamin must have become rather an office scandal, don't you think?

"But can you conceive it? I assure you it isn't the practise of our executives to go about sanitizing office boys! And me, a busy man as you know, and this young cormorant, a head taller than I am and old enough to tell me to go to the devil — and I was to gently persuade him to wash! I laughed at Miss Tripp. There was nothing else to do.

"She didn't laugh herself. She began something about how she wished someone would do it if I couldn't, and then she just stood there looking away from me with that pale, tired face, and putting her hand up to her temples in a brushing way. I tell you I felt awkward. I tried to jolly her, and she finally smiled and said she presumed she was too sensitive and probably Benjamin would improve before long. And I said of course he would — wasn't tomorrow Saturday night? — or some such feeble jest — and that was that. And I went back to work and tried to forget her. But I couldn't. That pale face and that brushing gesture — I couldn't get rid of them.

"I got to thinking that night, after I'd gone to bed, about Miss Tripp and Benjamin in their little office. It's quite a tiny office, d'you see? — really the end of a large office partitioned off to make a place for the files. And the files go up to the ceiling on three sides and there's no window and I daresay it's stuffy at best. Miss Tripp and her assistant are in there all day from 9 to 5, with forty-five minutes for lunch, and if one wants anything he usually goes to them instead of ringing. So there they are, cooped together eight hours on a stretch. Miss Tripp, by the way, is neatness itself. With Benjamin for an assistant — well, you can imagine!

"At any rate, I worried sufficiently to make a personal tour of inspection next morning. I am too tender about these things, but this was my doing in a measure, wasn't it? And sure enough, my forebodings were borne out. It was only about 10 o'clock, and Benjamin was in the back of the room and Miss Tripp was at her desk near the door, but — well, it was unmistakable. More so, it seemed to me, than the last time. Not so rusty, but heavier, darker —"

"Never mind the trivia," said Mrs. Dennison. "Go on."

"You must forgive me," said Mr. Shiveley. "The point is that it was ineluctable. You couldn't escape it, d'you see? Furthermore, I thought or imagined that Miss Tripp looked worse. Paler, frailer. I went out feeling positively alarmed. And still I didn't know what the devil to do. I am, after all, no white wing."

Mr. Shiveley tilted his glass for a long sip.

"You see the possibilities of the situation," he said. "The solemn young Alger hero solemnly avid over the new job, solemnly going at it with only a necessary word or so to the woman. Absorbed in his future. Probably looking at her, when he did solemnly eye her, as an obstacle to overcome. She might get sick, die — did she not look queasy today? — and he would get her job. And quite oblivious to everything else. If anyone had told him he was repugnant, and why, he would have — I don't know! Solemnly blinked? Maybe gone berserk, hit out or something desperate. And the woman — her neatness, her frailty, she's like scoured porcelain — and into this sanctum of hers blunders this great, mephitic creature, to stay there, to sit silently reeking, to move close to her sometimes and sometimes to move off a little, but never far enough, and this for hours a day and God knows if, when she flees the office, she can leave It behind! Probably feels It running after her, sticking to her clothes — waking up in the night, you know, with It in the room. Oh, it's a situation, don't you think? And yet, because she's timid and her work is her religion and she's a lady withal, plucking it out, biting her lips, keeping the little handkerchief close at hand with the lavender on it —"

"It is quite a situation," said Mrs. Dennison. "You tell it well."

Mr. Shiveley bowed his appreciation, and munched another olive.

"That's not all," he said. "I told you the thing worried me. It haunted me. I avoided the clipping room. I tried not to think about Miss Tripp or Benjamin. Then, trying not to, I would think about them. I'd begin wondering if Benjamin was worse or better today, if Miss Tripp looked paler or brighter, and I'd invent an excuse to go to the clipping room. There they were — Miss Tripp at her desk and Benjamin at his — or else moving solemnly about, taking down files, putting them up — and the presence, so to speak, always there.

"Now here's the part you must use your inventiveness on." Mr. Shiveley accepted the fresh glass without protest. He paused, the twinkle renewed. "I finally had a dream, d'you see? Perhaps I'd been working too hard, too much worry, too much coffee, bad circulation — at any rate, not shipshape. For I don't often have nightmares, and this was one — make no mistake! I'd been lying awake, thinking about the office, and of course into my head popped Benjamin and Miss Tripp, and the same old feeling of responsibility got hold of me, and you know that time when you're half awake and half asleep, and your thoughts slip over into dreams, and you don't know which you thought and which you dreamed and which really happened?

"Well, it seemed to me suddenly that I was in the office, regular working day, only it was different, and we were all very much worried about something, something secret and hushed up, only everyone knew what it was, and things were tense, appre-

hensive, and the thing we were worried about was Benjamin. And Benjamin — d'you see? — was worse. Much worse. It was all about. Over the transom. Into other offices. Out into the corridors. Visitors were noticing and we were ashamed to tell them the truth. The building people were complaining. Yet still we were afraid to speak to Benjamin. And all the time Miss Tripp was in there, working away, with her pale face and her eyes getting bigger and hollower, and her hand coming up every now and then and brushing at her forehead. It was awful!

"Then — and here's the gruesome part, you really can do it awfully well — someone suggested that we might go to Benjamin's people. So we did. We didn't know anything about them, but we found his mother and she was an old woman in rusty black and she was sitting before a table with a candle on it. The candle was burning and Benjamin's mother was wailing, but we paid no attention to that whatever — you know how it is in dreams — just went up to her brusquely and told her she must speak to Benjamin.

" 'Benjamin?' said the old woman. 'Benjamin?' And she looked at us with big, scared eyes. 'Benjamin is dead!'

"D'you see? Do you get it?" Mr. Shiveley put down his glass all but untouched. "He'd been dead for weeks and weeks — oh, all the time he was working for Miss Tripp and a long time before that, and we didn't know it! *He was just a corpse — walking around the office decomposing!*"

Mrs. Dennison stared wide-eyed at Mr. Shiveley. He was gratified.

"Of course," he said, "it's fantastic. But horror stories nowadays —"

"I know," said Mrs. Dennison, "you can get away with a lot — in stories."

Mr. Shiveley sipped his highball.

"The little touches," he said. "You know how. They go out to the grave and, sure enough, it's empty. A faint odor about it" — he twinkled violently — "of sweat! A faint odor of sweat about the grave!"

"Really," she said, "you must do it yourself."

"You flatter me," said Mr. Shiveley. "Or, if it is too fantastic, leave out the dream. I go back to the office, determined on action. I enter the clipping room. Benjamin must go! But Benjamin is not there. Only Miss Tripp. And she is bright. The color flows in her cheeks like wine. 'Where is Benjamin?' I say. She shakes her head; she smiles mysteriously. 'I do not know; he didn't come to work today.' I regard Miss Tripp. She pales, she flushes. I understand. But I will keep her secret."

"You mean — ?"

"*Murder!*"

"I see," said Mrs. Dennison. She studied the toe of her slipper. "I was thinking of another solution — in the event, say, you told Benjamin."

"You mean — suicide?" Mr. Shiveley laughed heartily. "Not a bad climax, but I really prefer murder."

"Oh, you could still have a murder," said Mrs. Dennison.

Inspector Chafik of the Baghdad C.I.D. and the lovely, terrified girl who kept seeing

THE LONG, THIN MAN

by CHARLES B. CHILD

THE INSPECTOR KNEW THE ENGlishman was lying. The knowledge embarrassed him and he fidgeted with his tie. He was nervous, almost defensive, too ingratiating in the presence of this foreigner, and therefore angry. For relief from his embarrassment the Inspector looked at the corpse of Major Wick's brother, lying in the corridor of the big house.

"Robert was attacked by some intruder," the major was saying. "Obviously the fellow got in by the window of the spare guest room. I found it open and the door ajar —"

Chafik J. Chafik, Criminal Investigation Department of the Baghdad police, thought: Yes, but there are no recent fingerprints on the inside knob of the door. It was opened from this side. And the window also. . . .

He resisted an impulse to nibble a manicured fingernail and took out a handkerchief to wipe his swarthy face instead. The Englishman, an old resident of Baghdad, was a leading member of the foreign colony and had powerful friends in official circles.

"I heard Robert shout as I was coming up the stairs," the major went on. "This house is a barn and it took me a minute to get here. I saw nobody. My wife was in her room and heard nothing — eh, Angela?"

Wick raised a strong chin; it was many years since his army days, but he retained the habit of command. He was a spare man and his thick eyebrows made a silver bar across the yellow of his sun-dried skin.

Inspector Chafik interrupted, "Madam is upset. So natural, of course —" He made a polite bow and thought he had rarely seen a woman so beautiful, or so frightened.

The major had married her in England early that year, surprising his friends, for he had been ten years a widower.

Chafik recalled the first Mrs. Wick, a Persian woman whom this emotionally inarticulate man had loved deeply. There was a child, a daughter named Zarifa after her beautiful mother; a girl of twelve would need a foster mother for the companionship and guidance which a father, alone, could not give.

But the Inspector wondered if that was the only reason for remarriage. Angela Wick was young and very lovely. Her slim figure was boyish in

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well-cut slacks and the pastel bloom of her skin was the rare gift of meadows and misty northern skies.

May she also have gifts of wisdom and patience, Chafik hoped. This man has toiled too long tending a garden of remembrance. . . .

He turned to Wick and asked in precise English, "Who else might have heard the intruder? Perhaps your daughter? I have not seen her, and —"

The major's chin went up again, challengingly. "I'll not have Zarifa brought into this. She's in her room. She knows nothing. I've already questioned her."

"You forget, sir, I am the detective in this case." Chafik's voice showed no impatience; he was still being cautious. But he noted that Angela Wick was on the verge of hysteria. The major was coldly defiant.

Puzzled and disturbed, the Inspector went to look at the body.

Wick's brother had been killed by a stiletto thrust upward under the lower ribs from the front. The initial stab had brought him to his knees, and bowing over, he had fallen on the knife and impaled himself by his own weight. A mark in the chenille pile of the carpet showed where the handle of the knife had been driven against the floor.

A police sergeant who had been bending over the body stood and announced in Arabic, "Sir, there are no fingerprints on the knife."

"Then it would appear, Abdullah, that the killer had invisible hands."

"No, sir. A cloth has been used and all is wiped clean. Recently," the sergeant added as he packed away his insufflator.

Chafik said complainingly, "Like my morning newspaper, you offer a dismal dish. Is there nothing more appetizing?"

"This?" Sergeant Abdullah asked hopefully, and he held up a wire coat hanger.

"That, too, is indigestible. Where did you find it?"

"There, on the floor," Abdullah said, indicating a spot near the first bedroom along the corridor.

Chafik shrugged and knelt to examine the corpse. As he worked, he reviewed what he knew of Robert Wick from the man's visits to Baghdad.

A hearty extrovert with a booming laugh, heavy in humor as in body. Insensitive, but not ungenerous, within the limits of shrewdness which had made him a very wealthy man. He had many financial interests, including investments in his brother's business, an old established importing firm.

There were rumors that the major's affairs were in bad shape, and this possibly explained Robert Wick's current visit.

The Inspector recalled that the dead man had never married and made note to ask who would inherit. "But have a care," he chided himself. "You may find yourself in the coils of a hypothesis —"

He heard his voice and was angered

by his bad habit of thinking aloud. Then he was embarrassed, for, looking up, he saw Major Wick at his side and he knew the man's Arabic was fluent.

"You see," Chafik said rapidly to cover his confusion, "there is very little blood, not enough to soil the hand that used this knife. An unusual weapon, by the way. A curio. It should not be hard to trace."

Wick said, "A dacoit's dagger from India. I've had it for years. I used it as a paper knife."

"Then how —"

"I don't know. Robert might have picked it up among some of my papers he took to his room. Perhaps he dropped it, and the intruder —"

"Ah, yes, the intruder. The one with invisible hands —"

"What the devil d'you mean?"

The little Inspector stood up. He was no longer nervous or ingratiating; confidence gave him dignity and stature.

"I mean," he said, "your story of this intruder is unworthy. Nobody entered by the window of the spare guest room. And the knife was wiped clean. Not by the killer — he had not time. You were already on the stairs — so who wiped the knife, Major?"

He looked from the major to Mrs. Wick; his dun-colored eyes were normally lifeless, but now they were animated by shadows because he clearly saw the woman's fear.

"You've got to tell him, Jack!" Angela Wick said to her husband. "He'll find out — he —" Suddenly she covered her face with her hands and stood peering through open fingers, watching something far down the corridor.

A young girl was in the doorway of one of the rooms. She wore a nightdress and it revealed the soft curves of a figure coming early and splendidly to maturity. Her loosened hair tumbled almost to her waist like a shining black veil. She stood lightly poised on dainty feet.

And then, shockingly, she laughed, peal on peal of laughter. "The long, thin man!" shouted the girl. "I saw him — he killed Uncle Robert! The long, thin man — there he is. There —"

Pointing at nothing, staring with huge and luminous eyes, she laughed again.

Inspector Chafik, who knew fear in every shape, saw the specter once more. He whispered, "God the Merciful, the Loving —" and ran to the child, but Major Wick was before him.

"Don't listen to her!" Wick said almost savagely as he held his daughter. "Don't bother her! You see how it is. She doesn't know what she's saying."

"He's gone now, Daddy," Zarifa said in a clear, quite normal voice. "But he'll come back, he always does. Be careful, Daddy! I love you, Daddy — the long, thin man wants to kill you —"

The major swept his daughter into his arms and carried her to her room. Mrs. Wick hurried after them, and as Chafik stood aside to let her pass he heard the Englishwoman whisper, "In

God's name, have pity!" She went in and closed the door.

He stood listening to the sound of their voices and the diminishing laughter of the girl. Presently the door opened and Wick came out with a soldier's step. Looking down at the Inspector, he said, "Let's go and talk."

As they went along the corridor the voice of the Englishman's daughter followed, shouting, "Daddy, Daddy, don't leave me! I want Adma. Adma!" Wick turned his head distractedly and then increased his stride.

When they were in the study below, the major asked, "Where shall I begin?"

Chafik did not answer immediately. He was looking at an oil painting above the fireplace, the portrait of a very beautiful woman who had the shining black hair and luminous eyes of Zarifa. "Tell me about the long, thin man," he said.

"The long, thin man doesn't exist."

The major's voice was reserved.

Chafik, who considered controlled emotion a form of masochism, perched himself on the edge of a chair and began, "I had heard your daughter was ill, but I did not know what illness. When did it start?"

"After we returned from England. I left Zarifa here with her old nurse while I went away to be married."

"The nurse is the woman for whom she calls?"

"Yes. Adma. She was my first wife's personal maid and raised Zarifa after Mrs. Wick died."

Chafik wondered what had happened to the nurse. He asked, "What does Zarifa see?"

"She says she sees a long, thin, shadowy man. That's her only description. At first she was always alone when it happened, but recently she's been seeing him even when we're there. Her mind — has gone." The major's voice was calm.

Chafik said, "But children live in a world of fantasy. I, too, am a father and my small son constantly shocks me. Only yesterday he informed me he was a corpse and demanded I should solve his murder!" The Inspector smiled faintly at the memory, then went on gently, "Seeing things you do not see is not proof of Zarifa's insanity."

Wick reached for a decanter and poured himself a stiff drink. It was his only concession to feeling. "You must find her insane!" he said harshly.

Inspector Chafik stood up, staring at the man in the chair.

"You have a peculiar desire. It means only one thing —"

"Yes," Wick said. "I was a fool to try and hide it. A fool to wipe the knife, to fake that story about an intruder. But what else could I do? Wouldn't you, as a father?"

He reached for the decanter and then pushed it aside with repulsion.

"My daughter killed my brother."

The Inspector went to the window and leaned out. He dared not look at the oddly calm man, not until his own distress was less evident. The garden outside was peaceful and the air came

cool and clean from the nearby desert.

He had pity for the man in the chair, and pity for the new wife. Angela Wick had come to Baghdad dazzled by marriage to a distinguished man, and had found, not romance in a fabled land, but the tragedy of another woman's child.

Reluctantly Chafik turned his back on the night. He said quietly, "May I have the details?"

The major shrugged. "You'd find out anyway."

"I am attentive," the Inspector said.

"It seemed advisable, because of her illness, to send Zarifa to England," Major Wick began. "Robert was prepared to take her there, to a proper place —"

Chafik interrupted, "I confess surprise. Forgive me, but your brother had a reputation for hardness."

"He was a very hard man. Not with Zarifa, though. She was his only niece and he adored her — willed his fortune to her. She is his sole heir."

"So?" Chafik said, and lighted a cigarette.

"I kept hoping her condition might improve," the major said. "Last night we discussed it all again — Angela, Robert, and I. They almost convinced me special care was necessary."

"Madam could do nothing with Zarifa?"

"She tried. She was wonderful. My first wife's child, you know — not normal — inflicted on her —"

Wick stopped. When he was incoherent there was warmth in his voice, but he went on formally: "Afterward, Angela went to her room, and Robert and I talked business, the reason for his visit. Suddenly we heard Zarifa screaming and then she came tearing in here, babbling about the long, thin man. The usual nightmare. Sometimes so convincing that I've almost believed —"

Chafik nodded. "Up there in the corridor I also wondered."

Wick softened and said, "She opens a door. She goes into another world. I tried to explain that to Robert, but he wasn't the sort of chap to take it seriously. He always teased Zarifa about her long, thin man. It was foolish of him to laugh at her when she came in babbling. I'm sure that's why she snatched up the knife. He made her so furious, you see."

"The anger of a child is normally primitive," Chafik said.

"My wife came in at that moment," the major went on. "She caught hold of Zarifa's arm and tried to take the knife away, but Zarifa tore loose and ran out, shouting at Robert, 'The long, thin man will kill you!' She locked herself in her room, so we all came back here."

"And then what?" Chafik asked.

"Oh, finally I told Angela to get some rest, and Robert and I tried to get back to business. But we couldn't, so he went up to his room and I followed, stopping to put out the lights. That's when I heard him shout."

"There were words?"

"Yes. He shouted, 'You little devil!' "

Chafik clasped his hands.

"I found Zarifa standing over him," the major said. "She was babbling about the long, thin man. I got her into her room somehow. Then I woke Angela. She'd taken a pill, mercifully slept through it. I told her what had happened and we cooked up our story."

The Englishman sat drained of words, frozen in the chair.

There were voices in the garden, an excuse to go to the window again. The Inspector saw his assistant, Sergeant Abdullah, come out of the shadows forcibly propelling a woman.

"What have you?" he asked.

Looking up, Abdullah said, "Sir, I found this woman attempting illegal entry by way of the spare guest room."

The woman, who was as tall as her captor, and as gaunt, cried, "May a dead mother's ghost curse you! Let me to the little one! She cries for me — my Shiraz rose cries for me."

Wick joined the Inspector, and explained, "She's Zarifa's old nurse, Adma."

"She is no longer the child's nurse?"

"No. She lives in a cottage on my grounds and we keep her away from Zarifa as much as possible. Angela thought she was a bad influence, might even have turned Zarifa's mind. I suppose the woman heard what happened tonight, and —"

"Why was Adma's influence bad?" Chafik asked. He looked across the room, saw Mrs. Wick in the doorway, and repeated the question to her. "I seek an explanation for all this fantasy," he said.

"Adma is the explanation," Angela Wick said furiously. "She was filling Zarifa's head with rubbish, fantastic stories —"

"But," said the Inspector, "surely the mind of a child needs the nourishment of make-believe? I find no harm in it."

"It depends on the child. Zarifa is highly strung and imaginative. You don't seem to know much about modern psychology," Mrs. Wick said. Then she added wearily, "But what does it matter now? She's calling for Adma. Let the woman go to her. She might calm the child. She can do no more harm — not now."

The calm voice suddenly broke and Mrs. Wick threw herself on a divan. The major went to his wife and put his arms around her.

Embarrassed, the Inspector slipped from the room. He was a religious man and his lips moved as he sought comfort in the Koran. But this time prayer failed him. "The Devil has made me a policeman," he said, and went slowly up the stairs to continue a policeman's work.

The corridor had dim lights and a high ceiling. The Inspector paused to study the layout of the rooms.

On the left was Mrs. Wick's bedroom, which communicated with her husband's. A third room on the same side belonged to Zarifa. Chafik could hear the crooning voice of the nurse, and he listened, for he was multilingual and understood Persian.

"This Adma encourages the fantasy about the long, thin man," he told Sergeant Abdullah, who stood guard. "Encourages, or does not disbelieve," he said.

"Sir, I have seen many long, thin men since I have been here. The shadows are deceptive."

"Have a care, Abdullah. They may not be all shadows!"

The Inspector listened again and heard Zarifa's chatter, which sounded quite normal. He was relieved because he had a final and difficult interview before closing the case. He knocked on the door.

Adma opened it. Her angular shoulders were on a level with his head as she stood barring entrance. "It is not seemly to enter the sleeping chamber of a maid," she shrilled.

"With such a chaperon the maid has nothing to fear," the Inspector answered. "Furthermore, I am a father."

Zarifa was sitting on the bed. She wore a dressing gown, and her black hair was neatly combed and tied back with a ribbon. Her face was lovely, as classic in its own way as Angela Wick's. The nose was delicately chiseled, the eyes large and wide apart. She had a creamy skin, faintly touched with rose-petal duskiness — her Persian mother's coloring.

The girl said, looking calmly at Chafik, "Did you find him?"

"Him?"

"The long, thin man, you silly. I don't know what's wrong with you grownups," Zarifa said. "*Anybody* can see him."

Chafik said, "Alas! The eyes of grownups are often blurred. But I am attentive. Tell me, and I will search."

He sat by the child's side, smiling, and praying for her.

She stared at him and what she saw she liked, for he had a way with children. "He's long, you know," she confided. "I don't call him tall because he isn't. He stretches."

"How, Zarifa?" Chafik asked.

"Well, sometimes he's sort of dumpy. Then he grows, up and up, until he's very thin and his hat touches the ceiling."

"Ah, so he wears a hat. A hat like mine?" The Inspector indicated his black *sidarah*, the brimless hat worn by Iraquis.

Zarifa said, "That's a silly hat. No, I mean a proper one, like Daddy wears. And my thin man always has on a sort of coat. His walk's funny, sort of slinking, and he always keeps close to the wall. You never see his face. Sometimes I think he hasn't got one, or arms — but he must have arms because he killed Uncle Robert —"

The nurse interrupted, "Enough! Enough! Go you, man!"

Chafik wondered at Adma's sudden agitation; she had been calm enough until the dead man's name was mentioned.

"Did you like your uncle?" he asked Zarifa.

"Oh, yes."

"But *you* didn't!" Chafik challenged the Persian woman.

The nurse answered fiercely, "Should

I have love for him when he would take away my dear one?"

"Your ear," the Inspector said, "has been applied to an informative keyhole."

He turned back to Zarifa and asked, "Did you like your uncle better than your new mother?"

"Well, he played games with me and she didn't," the girl said. "But he did tease. He made me so angry, I —" She stopped, shuddered, then whispered, "The long, thin man came tonight. He opened my door and stood there. I was so frightened I hid my face and when I dared look he was gone, and I ran down to Daddy. Uncle was there and he laughed. That was when I became angry — so naughty."

"I heard about that," the Inspector said. "It *was* naughty. And then what did you do?"

"Ran back here and locked myself in."

"You had the knife?"

"No, I threw it away. I hated it. Oh, and I hated myself. I cried and cried, I was so sorry. I wanted to tell them, so I unlocked the door and went out. He was there —"

Perspiration trickled down the Inspector's back. "Uncle Robert?" he asked.

"The long, thin man — the long, thin man! He was there."

The girl's voice was suddenly shrill, wild with terror, and the nurse moved swiftly toward her. The Inspector intervened.

"Show me where you saw him," he said quietly, and taking Zarifa's hand he led her into the corridor.

She pointed to a spot near the door of her father's room.

"There," she said, calm again. "He was right up to the ceiling, bending over and creeping along the wall. Then Uncle came and shouted something. He saw him all right — he saw my long, thin man."

"And?" prompted Chafik.

"I don't know. I closed my eyes tight. There were funny sounds, thumps and a door shutting — I don't know — but when I peeped only poor Uncle was there. I ran to him. He —"

"Have done, man!" shouted the nurse.

The Inspector's swarthy face was gray. He said, "I am finished. But you, Adma, have *you* seen him?"

"He never appeared when I was about. He did not dare! But if the Little Rose says he comes, then he comes."

"Fantasy —" Chafik said in a carefully lowered voice and glancing at Zarifa; she was not listening.

"It is not fantasy!" Adma said fiercely. "So the foreign wife said. She blamed me and banished me. They planned to send my sweet one far away. But that they will not do, not now that he is dead!"

She moved to claim possession of Zarifa and her dark, thin face suddenly filled with emotion and horror. "Look!" she exclaimed. "Look what you have done, man!"

Zarifa was standing tiptoe, beckon-

ing urgently. The Inspector bent and the girl slipped an arm around his neck and put her cheek against his. She turned her head and he looked into her eyes, very dark, under smoky brows. He saw the pupils dilate and the eyes escape him to peer into the shadows.

"You see?" Zarifa whispered. "The long, thin man — there —"

And she pointed with sureness down the empty corridor.

There was no denying Adma now; she took Zarifa away. The Inspector stood fingering his wilted collar.

He said to Abdullah, who had been a witness, "You understood?"

"My English is imperfect, sir, my Persian confined to essentials, but I gathered the substance. God have pity on the child!"

"I looked into her eyes," Chafik said. "They are peepholes to another world, but not mad eyes."

"Sir, the evidence —"

"Abdullah, I think there is a devil in this house!"

The Inspector looked around distractedly and entered the room occupied by Robert Wick, to the right of Zarifa's door.

They had put the corpse on the bed, but Chafik gave it only a passing glance; he went to examine the dead man's papers, stacked on a desk under the window.

There was confirmation that the major was in financial difficulties. Robert Wick's investment in the importing business was small for a man of wealth; he could have taken loss, yet there was a copy of a letter he had sent to the major demanding repayment of a recent loan.

"You were his brother," Chafik said reprovingly to the corpse. "It would seem commercialism dilutes blood to the consistency of water."

He went up the corridor to Mrs. Wick's bedroom and was distressed by feminine disarray. To the Inspector, tidiness was a virtue; he reminded himself with chagrin that his own wife, an excellent woman in other ways, was as haphazard as Angela Wick.

"Surely," he said to himself, "primitive woman was equally careless with her gew-gaws of tiger's teeth and pots of woad! And the trophies of a husband's prowess," he added, reaching under the bed for an ivory walking stick.

Chafik took the stick with him, through a communicating door, into the other room. Here was order — even the toilet articles on the dressing table were neatly arrayed.

The single bed had been made ready for sleeping, and the Inspector, who considered even twin beds unromantic, was shocked by this evidence of connubial aloofness. He was disturbed, too, by a photograph in a silver frame, the picture of a dark-haired woman and her baby. The woman was Major Wick's first wife.

"Ah, poor Angela Wick!" Chafik said.

A closet door was open and he

went to close it. The major's suits hung on wire hangers, neatly arranged, and his shoes were lined up for inspection below. A bundle, however, had been pushed into a far corner and the Inspector was struck by this one odd piece of untidiness. The impeccable Major Wick would never dispose of a bundle thus.

Chafik shook it out and saw it was a military raincoat. Returning to the closet, he used the ivory walking stick to hook out a hat, which had been crushed under the bundled coat. It was old.

Chafik put the hat and coat on the bed. He studied them a long time and finally added the stick; that, too, interested him. He went back to the closet and noted a gap in the review of clothes.

Then he left the major's room, using the door into the corridor.

"What did you find near the corpse?" he asked Sergeant Abdullah.

The Inspector's voice alerted Abdullah and he came to attention. "Sir," he answered. "I found a wire coat hanger."

"Exactly where?"

"Between the doors of these two rooms, sir. Nearer the first one."

Chafik said savagely, "There is indeed a devil in this house." He went downstairs to Major Wick's study. The major was holding his wife's hand.

"Your daughter," Chafik announced abruptly, "is not mad."

Wick said, "She must be. Look what she did —"

"A father should have faith," the Inspector chided. "Surely you love Zarifa?"

"Love?" the major repeated in an odd voice, and released his wife's hand. "Zarifa means something — very wonderful," he said softly, and it was as though a key had turned in the lock of his reserve.

"A rose budding in a garden of remembrance," Chafik suggested, in Arabic.

Wick answered in the same tongue, "A Persian rose." He looked at the portrait above the fireplace, then became aware of his young wife, who was puzzled by the unfamiliar language. He said in freezing English, "Stick to your work, Inspector!"

"I try. It is hard." The Inspector played with the signet ring on his left hand. "Hard, your brother was hard," he went on with association of thought. "To have repaid that loan would have ruined you, business being what it is."

The major flushed. "So you have pried into his papers."

"I am a policeman. Major, you have already told me Zarifa inherits your brother's wealth. Who is the trustee?" Chafik spread his hand and added ingenuously, "I am so ignorant. A minor inheriting must have a guardian, that much I know. But if there is insanity —"

The major stood up in anger. "If you're trying to suggest —"

"Ah, that dangerous hypothesis!" the Inspector said quickly. "But let us take ourselves to Zarifa. I invite

you to take part in an experiment."

"On my daughter?"

"With your permission, sir —"

Mrs. Wick interrupted, "Don't let him, Jack! Don't let him play about with the poor child's upset mind."

"Madam," Chafik said. "An upset mind often returns to normal when violently agitated."

The Inspector stood aside and bowed Mrs. Wick and her husband up the stairs with the smooth urgency of an usher in a darkened theater.

When they were in the girl's room, Chafik faced them gravely. Zarifa, again lost in a world of fantasy, laughed gently while Adma the nurse tried to quiet her. The major's reserve was in shreds and the Englishwoman was near hysteria.

Chafik said in voice of command, "Wait here until I call you." He posted Abdullah at the door and went away.

The silence of the big house was oppressive; minutes passed, Wick became restless and was on the verge of challenging Abdullah's authority. Just then, they heard the Inspector call.

They all went out, the major first, then Mrs. Wick, Adma and Zarifa. The lights had been lowered, and the corridor was a place of many shadows.

But something not a shadow was near the door of Wick's bedroom.

It had the shape of a small, hunchbacked man who wore a cloak loosely over his shoulders; the collar was turned up to meet the brim of his hat. He stood motionless and facing the wall.

Zarifa's laughter stopped.

The dumpy form by the wall extended itself. Abnormally narrow shoulders lifted and the hat tipped back on the invisible head. Steadily growing, the thing became a long, thin giant, draped coat too short for the elongated body, sleeves flapping.

It was Mrs. Wick who screamed, not Zarifa.

The girl's voice rang out in triumph, "There! Now you all can see him — my long, thin man!"

The long, thin man moved with a swaying sideways walk like a crab. He sidled toward them — a figure oddly disembodied, empty, and seemingly without a face. His hat wobbled precariously and Mrs. Wick screamed again.

"Jack! Jack! Don't let him! Jack!" She clung to her husband's arm.

The long, thin man turned, then disintegrated. He became a hat, a raincoat, an ivory walking stick, and a wire coat hanger. Inspector Chafik, who held these things, looked only at Zarifa.

"You see, I found him," he said gently to the girl. "Look, I will build him again for you, your long, thin man."

He forced open the twisted wires of the coat hanger just below where they met to form the hook. Into this gap he jammed the tip of the walking stick. Next, he draped the

coat with the collar turned up, then balanced the hat on the hook so that it overlapped the edge of the collar.

"A scarecrow, eh?" Chafik said to Zarifa. His laugh made it a game.

"It's not my thin man —"

"Oh, but it is!" he told her, and added: "You shall see how it is used to scare crows — and imaginative girls."

He lifted his creation carefully by the stick and lowered it over his head and shoulders until the coat hanger rested on the nape of his neck. He bent his knees.

"You see how simple?" Chafik said to Zarifa. "Always keep your back turned to the crows you wish to scare and always stand in shadow against a wall. My knees are bent, but now I straighten them. Now what do you see?"

Zarifa said, "It's when he starts to grow!"

"Yes, and now he grows higher. I push up the stick, lift the coat on the hanger above my head. You see how the hanger becomes shoulders? Up, still higher — and the hat on the hook, you'd think there was a head under it, wouldn't you? And doesn't the upturned collar seem to hide a neck? See, Zarifa — I am hidden to the hips by the skirts of the coat."

He turned to the girl, absorbed in his anxiety for her, and his hope. "Now what do you think?" he asked.

Zarifa smiled. "I think it's a very silly trick," she said, clearly and normally. "Was that what frightened me? Was that what I saw — always?"

"Nearly always. Sometimes you imagined you saw him, a sort of wide-awake dream. It is nice to play make-believe, and all right so long as you don't frighten yourself with parlor tricks. But you won't be frightened any more," Chafik added in a sure voice. "Now you know what the long, thin man is, you will never see him again."

Zarifa frowned. "What a naughty thing to do, to scare me that way. Who did it? Uncle Robert? He did love to tease."

"Go with Adma, Zarifa," Inspector Chafik said gently.

He heard the girl's door close. Then he turned to the major and said, "Not Uncle Robert. No, obviously not. Uncle Robert died because he met the long, thin man."

"Who the devil —" the major began.

"The devil," the Inspector told him, "comes into the story. You see, you loved Zarifa too much. You never forgot her mother. You walked in a garden of remembrance, a place where a man must walk alone, where a new bride cannot enter —"

Angela Wick moaned. The major looked at her and then away. "Go on," he said.

"Jealous love conceived a monstrous plan. Inheritance played no part in it. To break the chain of the past it was necessary to break the strongest link, to remove the child who reminded you of the mother. So the imaginative state of Zarifa's

mind was noted, and the long, thin man created."

"Go on."

"The desired result was nearly achieved. Your brother offered to take the distracted child and place her in an institution in England. You were almost convinced after poor Zarifa's attack on your brother. But the devil chafed at waiting. So the long, thin man walked again —"

The Inspector paused as an actor would. He did not look at the major or at Mrs. Wick; his drab eyes watched the shadows.

He continued: "Your brother went upstairs and met the long, thin man, and when he cried, 'You little devil!' it was with recognition and understanding. The knife lay in the corridor where Zarifa had dropped it. Coincidence or fate?" The Inspector shrugged. "Many crimes are committed because a weapon comes to hand in a moment of impulse. In this case terror; because a secret had been discovered —"

"Go on," the major said again.

"The attack was made. Without premeditation," Chafik added hastily. "Also the thrust would not have killed your brother had he not fallen on the blade. A wise judge may even find it manslaughter, not murder."

"Go on." The small harsh phrase made Chafik wince.

"Listen," he said bitterly. "I do not try to excuse. One who would not hesitate to murder the mind of a child is beyond excuse. But you are not without blame, Major. There is a cherished ghost in this house. A portrait above the fireplace and dominating the room below. A picture by the bed, where you sleep alone. Pardon, I speak as a man, not a detective — you should never have remarried — never —" He stopped with embarrassment.

Angela Wick had turned to the wall. Her head was cradled on her arms, her body convulsed with sobs, more tearing because they were silent.

"Go on," the major said once more. His voice was no longer harsh; he stood frozen, and Chafik shivered, feeling the cold.

He cried in Arabic and with anger, "By the Compassionate One, be flesh! What more must I tell you? Of a coat hanger dropped near the body? The hat and coat bundled untidily in your very neat closet? The ivory walking stick thrust under Mrs. Wick's bed?"

The little man stopped, then asked delicately, "Does she always wear slacks in the house? I ask, because trousers were essential to give the long, thin man legs." Inspector Chafik did not look at Angela Wick.

Nor did the major. He turned away and went slowly into his daughter's room. He did not look back.

"Q"

When Vincent Starrett selected the twelve best detective-crime short stories as his recommendations for THE GOLDEN DOZEN, *he cautioned your Editors that he didn't "pretend to know" which are the twelve really best; nevertheless, he considered his list of twelve tales to represent "among the best . . . twelve stories that would be hard to beat; each in its own way seems to me great."*

Surely one of the most surprising selections made by Vincent Starrett was Melville Davisson Post's "The New Administration." Vincent admitted that this was "an unusual choice," but he went on to say that "honestly I believe I prefer it to any of the Uncle Abner tales."

Speaking only for ourselves, we cannot conscientiously agree with our good friend Vincent: our first choice of a Melville Davisson Post story would unconditionally be an Uncle Abner story. But we have such profound respect for Vincent's judgment, scholarship, and personal passion — in a phrase, for his 'tec taste — that we felt it mandatory to bring you Mr. Starrett's unorthodox nomination for one of the best mystery short stories of all time.

THE NEW ADMINISTRATION

by MELVILLE DAVISSON POST

THERE was a moment's silence after the attorney for the Government sat down. Everybody thought the judge would at once refuse the motion for a retrial and sentence the prisoner. There was plainly no error. The law was clear, the evidence was sufficient, and the judge had so strongly indicated the guilt of the accused in his charge to the jury that acquittal was out of the question; in fact, he had practically directed the jury to find the prisoner guilty.

Of course a motion to set aside the verdict is always made; but any one could see that it was a mere form here. Surely there was no shadow left for judicial hesitation after the attorney for the Government had finished. It would have taken only a moment, and tomorrow was the last day of the term; but, instead, the judge rose. He looked ill and tired. The heat was oppressive.

"I will pass on the motion in the morning," he said.

The attorney for the prisoner caught at the straw.

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"Your Honor will consider the argument?"

"Oh, yes," replied the judge in his tired voice. Then he added: "I have a telegram from the Department of Justice. Two judges of the Supreme Court will be here in the morning. I am asked to leave this case open." Then he swept away the hope: "You may have the benefit of their opinion on the length of sentence."

He looked worn out. It was July. The summer term of the District Court of the United States was always trying, but this sitting had been particularly oppressive. The usual catalogue of crimes — revenue infractions and the like — was commonly disposed of swiftly in this court; but he had not been able to expedite this case. It had expanded, lengthened, and worn out his patience. Perhaps dilatory, inefficient counsel was the real cause.

He went into his chamber, took off his black silk gown and gave it to his attendant. He gathered up some papers from his table and inclosed them with a rubber band; then he put on his hat and went out.

These Federal buildings have the city post office underneath. The judge did not go to the elevator. Several members of the local bar were in the cage. He knew how they would receive him. One would have a story to make him laugh; another some expression from his utterances to flatter — and so on. He felt that he was too tired and irritable to be annoyed; but he did not escape.

On the steps he met the attorney for the prisoner. He was a man who had come up into a practice through the petty intrigues of local politics. He had learned in that school to approach his object obliquely, and he carried this plan into the trial of his cases. He cultivated an open, hearty manner to cover his subtlety.

"Judge," he said, "I wish you could manage to go easy on Johnson." And he began to urge the estimable life of the cashier, his long residence in the community, and the fact that no length of penal sentence could help anybody; then he added:

"I think the man is telling the truth, Judge. I think he was trying to save the bank."

It was false. His experience moved him to accept the worst motive among all possible ones. The judge, ill and overborne, stopped him.

"I won't hear you, Dickerman," he said. "I am tired of these curbstone arguments."

The man was unabashed.

"Sure, Judge," he replied; "but I got worked up over Johnson. It's an awful pity. He has a nice home and the best little woman in the world."

He said it in the big, emotional manner he was accustomed to use in his campaigns among the people, and it was true as far as he went; but he neglected to add that the nice home went to him provided he kept the cashier out of the penitentiary — everything else he had got hold of on a straight-out fee. But he was shrewd. He saw that this was no

moment to go farther, and he stepped out of the way.

"I'm glad you're going to join the family at the shore tomorrow night. It'll do you good, Judge . . . Rotten hot here!" And he went on.

Three doors opened from the post office into the street — the great double one in the middle for the public and, on each side of it, one to the elevator and another to the stairway. A big, new motorcar stood by the curb and a man in the shade of the building, by the door on the elevator side, was fanning his heated face with a panama hat. He had about him every indicatory evidence of a leading citizen. He was past middle life — in the neighborhood of sixty. He stood erect, with the expansive front that the dominion of money and success gives to those lucky men who get up in the world out of a humble origin.

When the judge came out of the Federal Building on the stairway side, the man stepped down to the motor, opened the door of the tonneau and threw up his hand in a friendly signal. The judge entered the motor and sat down as though it were a custom.

"Thank you, Tollman," he said. "It's mighty kind of you to stop for me this way."

"No trouble, Judge," replied the man. "I never leave the bank until four o'clock and it's only a turn round the block for you."

He got in, closed the door and the motor moved away from the curb. Then he added:

"What do you suppose the Department's after?"

He had heard the telegram discussed by the spectators coming out of the courtroom.

"It's a national bank," said the judge. "The Government may have some special interest." Then he added: "Members of the Supreme Court sometimes sit on the circuit, or the Chief Justice may be going out to the Circuit Court of Appeals. We are on the way; it's nothing unusual."

"You didn't sentence Johnson," said the man.

"I left the whole matter open," replied the judge. "If the members of the Supreme Court sit tomorrow they can fix the sentence."

"Dead open-and-shut case?" said Tollman.

"Oh, yes," replied the judge.

He felt very tired and indisposed to talk, but he regarded the obligations of friendly courtesy. Again Tollman slapped his big knee with his fat hand.

"It's a pity! . . . Nice fellow, Johnson — not very smart."

"I thought the trick by which he covered the cash shortage from the bank examiner was exceedingly clever," said the judge. "Has such a thing been done before?"

Tollman pulled out his underlip between his thumb and finger; his foot tapped on the floor of the car.

"Never heard of it," he said. "If anybody ever used it before he was smart enough not to get caught." Then he turned about toward his

companion. "You're wrong, Judge; Johnson ain't smart. I saw that when he first came into the bank, under me — when I was cashier of the Eighth National."

He had the appearance, whether false or true, of one giving an inside opinion in confidence to a friend.

"He's just a trailer — got no initiative. The bank was bound to go to the wall in competition with modern investment methods. Johnson never struck out on a new line in his life; he followed what other men did. Why, Judge!"

He put his fat hand on his companion's arm as though indicative of a deeper confidence.

"He's been running that bank just the same way I used to run it before I made my strike in Universal Steel Common and started the Citizens' National."

He paused and puffed out his chest.

"The banking business must keep up with the times, like any other business."

"Universal Steel Common?" replied the judge. "Isn't that the stock Johnson was gambling in with the bank funds?"

Tollman rocked his big torso in confirmation.

"Exactly!" he said. "The very same! Only it's no good now — went to pot two years ago. The broker knew it was taking pennies out of a blind man's hat. Imagine anybody buying that stock now!"

Then he added in a firmer tone:

"No, Judge; Johnson ain't smart. You know how the banking business goes. Sometimes you have to take a nibble at bad stuff to help out a good depositor. Take, for instance, the big block of Gas bonds that first got his bank in bad. He asked me whether the Citizens' National was a subscriber. Well, it wasn't up to me to knock Old Blackwell's bonds. He's a good depositor. I said yes. It was the truth. We had a little of it — covered on the side, of course. . . . Johnson has no sense."

"He has sense enough to know that he was violating the banking laws of the United States," replied the judge.

The big man laughed.

"He knew that all right, I reckon."

"I suppose," continued the judge, "he thought his plan would not be discovered; and perhaps it would not have been but for the chance of your bank opening one of the packages."

Tollman did not reply. The car had entered the street on which the judge lived. It was a street ending in the public highway. A huge, old brick house sat in a grove of ancient maples, on a big plot of ground, at some distance from the street. There was an old-fashioned, low iron fence, with a little gate opening into a red-brick path, before the place. The car stopped. Tollman leaned across his guest and flung the car door open. He spoke, with his head down:

"I was offered the leases on the Haverford oil tract mighty low today."

The judge did not at once reply. He got out. Then he answered:

"Lawsuits are uncertain! Thank you, Tollman."

It was all the hint the man wanted. The lands were in litigation in the Federal Court and this was a look through the keyhole.

The judge opened the gate and went slowly up the brick path to his door. He was alone in his house for this day and night. His family and servants had gone to the coast to avoid the midsummer heat. He would join them tomorrow night, when his court term closed. He would be glad of the vacation. This evening he felt utterly fagged out and worthless.

As the path turned round some shrubs he saw a figure huddled against his door. The attitude was peculiar. The figure did not seem to be sitting against the door, nor yet was "huddled" the word to describe that posture. The figure seemed to be bent over — the head down, the legs doubled under it, the shoulders and the back stooped. At the sound of his advancing feet the figure rose. He saw that it was the prisoner Johnson's wife; and he remembered vaguely that just now he had not seen her in her accustomed place by the prisoner's chair.

The whole aspect of this woman was one of inconsolable misery. Her eyes were swollen; the muscles of her face were drawn; her mouth seemed slack and loose, and from time to time it trembled, though the woman no longer wept. She was young; but her worn, faded, neglected dress, the strain of the long trial, the despair at the result of it, and the constant misery had aged her. Her brown hair looked dead about the livid face, twitching from lack of sleep.

"Oh, Judge," she said, "won't you save him?" The extremity of bitter misery was in the broken voice. "He did no more than other men had done before — only he did it for the bank — not for himself. He thought everything Mr. Tollman had anything to do with was all right. I know all about it. The jury didn't understand. You don't understand!"

This was the one thing the judge loathed and hated — this emotional appeal of the wife, the mother, the sweetheart of the accused. Women never understood that courts considered only proximate causes; that men were tried for the commission of those overt acts that by the letter of the law constituted a crime. They never understood that ultimate motives, influences and all the vast ramifications of an event could not be inquired into. They never regarded legal rules governing the introduction of evidence; that the law did not consider what one thought or believed; that cases were not tried on feeling. The judge endeavored to explain that all the things she urged could not be considered in the case — and how irregular her conduct was.

"I cannot hear you," he said.

The woman swayed a moment, looking him in the face; then she sank down in that peculiar posture — on her knees, her back bent, her face

in her hands. And she began to speak, trembling, shaken, with jerky words:

"What'll I do? . . . You won't hear me. . . . Oh, God! What'll I do? He's a good man. I know him; I'm his wife. . . . He didn't mean any harm. The things other men did drove him into it. Oh, God! If the judge would only think about everything! If there was only somebody to understand everything!"

It seemed to the judge that the best thing for him to do was to pass quickly. He opened the door with a latchkey, entered and closed it behind him. Then he put down his hat and, with his bundle of legal papers under his arm, went slowly up the stairway. At the first landing he stopped, held on to the baluster and looked back. Through the little squares of glass along the side of the door he could see the woman on the porch in that abject position, the tears trickling through her fingers.

The court opened with the two Supreme Judges sitting with the District Judge. A gust of rain had cleared out the heat. The air was fresh. Everybody seemed vitalized and restored to the energies of life — except the District Judge. He looked the mere physical wreck of a man. His face was pallid and his jaw sagged as he sat in his black silk robe between his two associates. Perhaps the fine, clean-cut, vital faces of those two associate judges brought his ill appearance more conspicuously to the eye.

The courtroom was crowded. Everybody came in to see the visiting members of the Supreme Court.

We have a belief that the conduct of great affairs and elevation above the passions and interests of men give, in time, to the human face a power and serenity beyond anything to be observed in our usual life. And the aspect of these two members of the highest tribunal in the world amply justified this theory. Everybody was impressed. The courtroom was silent. The clerk and attendants went about on tiptoe and spoke in whispers. There was an atmosphere of dignity that swept out and ejected every trivial thing.

There was here, now, the awe and the solemnity, the grip of power, that we feel must inevitably attend the majestic presence of that vast, dominating, imperial thing we call the State. Everybody felt that, at last — finally — he was before that regal ultimate authority that ruled the order of his life and the conduct of his affairs, pressing on him on all sides invisibly, like the air — an authority that he could not resist or question.

The whole local bar was in the courtroom. The chairs before the attorneys' tables were filled. The entire jury panel was present. The prisoner Johnson sat inside the rail, near his attorney. He sat with his head down, his hands open and resting awkwardly on his knees, like one who, having passed through every misery, dumbly awaits the end of all things.

His wife was now in the chair beside him. Her face was washed out and gray, like plaster; but it was lifted; and the wide-distended eyes followed every act and gesture of the two majestic judicial figures. She did not move; she saw nothing about her in the courtroom; she heard no sound or whisper. Those visiting members of the Supreme Bench, sitting on each side of the almost ghastly District Judge, alone engrossed and dominated her attention.

The younger justice, on the left of the bench, conducted the business of the court.

"The case," he said, "of the United States *versus* Carter Johnson is before us on a motion to set aside the verdict of the jury and grant a new trial."

His voice, clear and even like a sheet of light, filled the remote corners of the courtroom.

"On yesterday we directed the District Judge to hold this case open until we could arrive and sit with him. It is not the custom of the Department of Justice, to which we belong, to interfere in the temporary conduct of matters in these inferior tribunals below us; but this case has been brought forcibly to our attention and we have determined to appear here and dispose of it.

"Carter Johnson was the cashier of the Eighth National Bank of this city. He was convicted in this court on two separate counts — the misappropriation of bank funds and the falsification of the bank statement under oath. The facts are that the directors of this bank left the conduct of its affairs to the cashier, Johnson, as they were accustomed to do with the former cashier. Johnson invested heavily in an issue of Gas bonds. These securities rapidly depreciated in value. To recoup the loss Johnson speculated with bank funds. This speculation was unsuccessful, and to cover the cash shortage in his accounts Johnson resorted to a deceptive trick."

The justice went on:

"It is a custom of the Treasury Department of the United States to send out packages of money. These packages, when received, are inclosed by a strip of paper pasted round them. This strip of paper or label is stamped with the amount and denomination of the bills making up the package. No bank questions the correctness of these labels. Carter Johnson made use of this Treasury custom in order to cover the cash shortage in his bank.

"He carefully preserved the printed bands from the packages of bills of high denomination that his bank would get from the Treasury in the course of business. When the examiner appeared he would remove the bands from packages of low denomination, paste on the false bands, and send out these apparently original Treasury packages to other banks in the city. He would ask the banks to hold these packages and let him have loose currency. By this plan he was able to show his cash on hand correct. Later, when the examiner was gone, he would return the currency and re-

ceive back his packages. This trick, invented by an intelligence, cunning and regardless of fair dealing, enabled him to cover his defalcations for a considerable period."

Then he concluded:

"These are the facts. They were established beyond doubt and the verdict of the jury was inevitable."

He looked down at the prisoner.

"It is our opinion that the motion to set aside the verdict and grant a new trial ought to be overruled."

There was on the prisoner no evidence of this crushing blow, except that he seemed to sink down a little in his chair. The woman beside him gave no sign whatsoever. Perhaps she did not realize what these formal words meant — that they swept away her last vestige of hope; but the aspect of the prisoner, thus crumpled up as by some disintegrating pressure, drew the attention of the elder justice on the right of the bench. He spoke, looking out over the courtroom:

"That every man shall realize in his own person the result of his premeditated act is a condition of human affairs that we are not here to disturb."

There was no emotion in his face or in the words he uttered; there was only the supreme serenity of a phenomenon in Nature.

There was a moment of silence and the younger justice continued with the case.

"We are also of the opinion," he said, "that this whole matter ought to be disposed of. Rutger Beekman is in the courtroom. Let him stand up."

A little man, prim and very carefully dressed, who had been entirely hidden by the crowd, came out and stood before the rail. He looked discolored, and the lids below his eyes puffed as from the ravages of an organic disease. Everybody moved with interest. This was the Eastern broker to whom Johnson had sent the money for his speculations.

"You obeyed our summons?" said the justice.

The little man was very greatly disturbed.

"Yes, your Honor," he answered in a nervous voice.

The justice went on:

"The books in your office, exhibited to the Federal authorities, show that from time to time you purchased for Carter Johnson forty-eight thousand shares of Universal Steel Common at one dollar a share."

He stopped and looked down at the man before the rail.

"Your books do not show that a secret partner, one Livingston Prichard, created this market for your purchase with stock bought at its actual value of twenty-five cents a share. Where is the remaining thirty-six thousand dollars?"

The little man's face seemed to turn to ashes; he hung a moment on his toes, his mouth open. The justice went on, with no change in his calm, deliberate voice:

"The money, in United States gold certificates, is in safety-deposit box number 472 of the North Dominion

Trust Company, in the city of Montreal."

He paused.

"It is the order of this court that you, Rutger Beekman, turn over to the register the key to this box, now on your person, together with your order to the vault officer, signed with two marks under the signature according to your secret understanding with that official. You will also pay into court the amount of your commission — that is to say, one-fourth of one per cent on the whole sum of forty-eight thousand dollars."

Everybody was astonished. Hiram Tollman, president of the Citizens' National Bank, sitting behind the attorneys, knew that the Federal Secret Service had run this case down in every direction. He regretted now that he had taken so prominent a seat in the courtroom. With the result of so vast a system of secret espionage, no one could say what features of this affair might come up. He looked at the trembling broker turning over his key to the register of the court, and sweat dampened the palms of his hands. The calm voice of the justice was going on:

"The certificates delivered to Carter Johnson have been sold for their actual value of twenty-five cents a share; our order restores to the insolvent bank the entire sum drawn out by the cashier and adjusts this feature."

He paused and looked at his associate.

"Shall we consider, here, the aspect of Rutger Beekman's criminal responsibility?"

"Let it go over," replied the elder justice. "Beekman will be presently before us."

These words, simple and uttered with no threat or menace, gave everybody in the courtroom a sense of vague, unreasoning terror.

"We come now," continued the younger justice, "to a consideration of the original loss of the Eighth National Bank, which the cashier undertook to recoup by his speculations."

This was the thing of which the president of the Citizens' National Bank was apprehensive. He had hoped to slip out of the courtroom unnoticed. He was feeling under his chair for his hat, when the voice of the justice reached him as with the impact of a blow:

"Hiram Tollman is in the courtroom. Let him stand up."

He got on his feet, it seemed to the man, by no will and by no muscular effort of his own, his whole body damp with sweat. He looked up at the District Judge as for some cover or protection. The visiting justice crushed out the man's mute appeal.

"The District Judge," he said, "sits with us today for the purpose only of entering such orders as we shall direct."

And the fact was abundantly evident. The judge was not consulted and he took no part in the conduct of the court affairs. He sat between the two Supreme Court judges, pallid

and ill, his face sunken. The justice went on in his even voice:

"When the cashier of the Eighth National Bank was offered the block of Gas bonds he inquired whether your bank was a subscriber to the issue. You replied that it was. This answer, true in a narrow interpretation of words, was, in fact, intended to deceive. Your subscription was for ten bonds only and attended by collateral security. Carter Johnson took your answer to mean that you considered this issue to be a safe, desirable security. He relied on it and accordingly invested seventy-five thousand dollars in these bonds. The bonds were, in fact, worth twenty-five thousand — all of which you, Hiram Tollman, on that day and at the moment of the inquiry, well knew. . . . Now by that investment, so made, the Eighth National Bank lost the sum of fifty thousand dollars, and the succeeding events resulted."

The man standing up in the courtroom trembled, and sweat threaded along the creases of his obese body. He tried to urge some justification, but seemed unable to formulate the thing.

The elder justice appeared to grasp what he meant; for he said in his deep, level voice:

"It is not our purpose to hold one man responsible for the neglect of another. What one undertakes to do, or pretends to do, for the benefit of persons maintaining him in a position of trust, we hold him bound to perform."

The younger justice waited a moment, as though in emphasis of the pronouncement of the elder and as a profound courtesy. He looked down at the silent faces turned everywhere toward the bench. Then he went on:

"The directors of the Eighth National Bank are in the courtroom. Let them stand up."

Five men, sitting here and there on the packed benches, rose. The attorney, Dickerman, was general counsel for these directors. They were his best, his most substantial clients; and now, by a supreme measure of assurance, he rose and addressed the judges.

"Your Honors," he said, "these men are not in court as parties to any proceeding and no order can be entered against them."

The justice looked calmly at the man.

"Everybody concerned with this affair is before us," he said, "and will be included in our decree. As for you, Sylvester Dickerman, it is our order that you be allowed twenty-five dollars a day for your services during the conduct of the trial of Carter Johnson, and no more. You will return all fees above that sum, together with your contract contingent on the acquittal of the accused."

There was silence; and he added:

"We have observed your methods for a long time. They do not please us, Sylvester Dickerman. But we do not revoke your license. You will be presently before us, and we think that your knowledge of this fact will

be a sufficient safeguard of the public interest."

The man seemed appalled, like one who suddenly sees an invisible peril uncovered before him.

The justice went on:

"As for you" — and he named the five directors — "you have neglected the duties which you assumed to perform for the stockholders of the Eighth National Bank. In consequence of that neglect — but for one consideration — our decree would direct you to pay into the bank the loss of this investment — that is to say, the sum of fifty thousand dollars — out of your individual private fortunes.

"As the matter stands, you will pay, share and share alike, all the costs of the proceedings in this court, including the trial of Carter Johnson and the fees allowed by us to his attorney; all the costs and expenses of the receivership; and whatever sums are required to rehabilitate the Eighth National Bank."

The justice looked now at the prisoner, and that abject person rose as though the look were in itself a compelling summons. He stood with his body relaxed, his shoulders stooped, his head down. The woman beside him also rose, her strained white face fixed on the justice as by the fascination of some invisible sorcery. The whole courtroom was profoundly silent. Everybody thought that sentence on the prisoner was about to be pronounced; but, instead, the justice turned toward the man Tollman, standing within the rail behind the local bar.

"It is an elementary principle of justice," he said, "regarded by all men, that no one shall take a gain at the risk of another. He shall take his gain at his own risk."

He paused and addressed Tollman directly:

"It is on this conception of justice, Hiram Tollman, that we are about to consider your responsibility in this affair. That Carter Johnson trusted your judgment in the purchase of securities is a secondary matter, behind the primary duty of the cashier and directors of this bank to investigate for themselves. That you were cashier of this bank when Carter Johnson entered it as a clerk, and that he continued to be influenced by your methods and example, are not considerations moving us toward our decree."

Here the elder justice again uttered a pronouncement that no man present in the courtroom ever afterward forgot.

"That another influenced me," he said, "and I violated the law is a defense that we shall always reject."

Then the younger justice continued:

"The basis of our decree against you, Hiram Tollman, is in the fact that you took a gain at the risk of the Eighth National Bank. The money which you used in the first speculations, which made your fortune, was the money of this bank, in your custody as cashier. It was you, Hiram

Tollman, who invented the trick — afterward used by Carter Johnson — to cover the shortage in your currency during the period of your speculations. Unlike Johnson, you were successful in your investments. Your trick was not discovered; you put back the funds placed in hazard and converted the gain to your own use.

"You imagined, Hiram Tollman, that this matter was adjusted by the return of the funds. It was not so adjusted. The gain must be restored to adjust it. That gain, together with the legal interest to date, is one hundred and fifteen thousand dollars; and it is our order that you pay it in to the receiver of the Eighth National Bank within thirty days after the rising of this court."

All persons in the courtroom were amazed. The vast, invisible espionage of the Department of Justice appalled them. Every man connected in any degree with a doubtful affair was seized with apprehension and began to go back over the details of his life, fearful lest he had overlooked some avenue through which his affair might have come to the knowledge of this elaborate Secret Service, which nothing seemed to escape.

The younger justice ceased, and the elder, sitting on the right of the bench, addressed the prisoner. Everybody thought that he was about to deliver some elaborate opinion; but he uttered only one preliminary sentence.

"Excessive punishment," he said, "is, beyond all things, abhorrent to us. You are released from the custody of the marshal."

The prisoner, expecting to receive a penal sentence, would have fallen but for the arms of the woman about him, her face transfigured.

To all this the justices of the Supreme Bench gave no attention. The younger began to dictate the orders and decrees covering the points of his decision; and when they were written out the District Judge, sitting motionless in his black robes, signed them without a word:

"Enter.

WILLIAM A. PLAINFIELD."

It was night. The judges left the Federal Building, the District Judge walking between the two justices of the Supreme Court. Persons on the street, as in awe, crossed to the opposite side as the three impressive figures approached. They turned into the grounds of the District Judge and entered his house.

The community of misfortunes drew the banker — Tollman — the lawyer and the broker together as they came out on the street.

"Who summoned you to appear?" said Dickerman, addressing the broker. "The New York marshal couldn't find you when we sent over a subpoena."

"Nobody summoned me."

"How did you get notice to appear, then?"

"I didn't get any notice," replied the man. "I just felt that I had to come."

The lawyer looked at the broker a moment, his eyes wide, his mouth gaping; then, without a word, he crossed the street to the telegraph office, the others following. The operator was a friend of Dickerman's.

"Mack," he said, breathing quickly, like a man with a defective heart, "did the judge get a telegram yesterday?"

"Sure!" replied the man.

"Where from?"

"Washington, I reckon," answered the operator, turning over his file for the message, "It's not marked."

"Ask Washington," said the lawyer.

The line was open and the operator called. There was silence and after a time the instrument clicked.

"That's queer," said the operator — "not sent from Washington! That's damn queer! It came over the line."

They went out and along the street to the judge's residence, all moved in common by a single fearful idea. The house was wholly dark. They stopped at the gate. Other persons joined them. A crowd assembled. Finally it moved from the gate along the brick path to the door. The door was locked. No one replied to the bell or knocking.

Finally an officer got in through a window and opened the door. The family doctor joined him and the two men went up the steps together. The crowd waited, silent, in the hall and on the porch outside.

Suddenly the voice of the doctor reached them from an upper chamber, where he stooped over the body of a man lying across the threshold, his bundle of legal papers scattered on the floor.

"Dead! . . . The judge!"

Then, a moment later:

"Good God! His limbs are set in *rigor mortis!* He's been dead twenty-four hours!"

All at once, with a sickening sense of dread, the broker, the lawyer, the banker — everybody from the courtroom — realized that the District Judge had been sitting, for this day, between the two mysterious justices, after he was dead; and that, for this day, the administration of justice in the court had been taken over by the Ultimate Authority — infinite and just — behind the moving of events.

What kind of mystery-crime poem would you expect from the author of "The Waste Land," THE COCKTAIL PARTY, *and* THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK? *Well, here it is! Amusing, biting, satirical — altogether a delight . . . T. S. Eliot, Nobel Prize winner, has been described as "an Arrow Collar man"; his photographs reveal him as a handsome man with an ironical expression around his lips; he is said to wear his handkerchief in his cuff, have a sensitive palate for burgundies and sherries, play chess with deep seriousness, suffer from hypsophobia, and have a mortal dread of cows.*

But can that man write!

MACAVITY: THE MYSTERY CAT

by T. S. ELIOT

Macavity's a Mystery Cat: he's called the Hidden Paw —
For he's the master criminal who can defy the Law.
He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair:
For when they reach the scene of crime — *Macavity's not there!*

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law, he breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare,
And when you reach the scene of crime — *Macavity's not there!*
You may seek him in the basement, you may look up in the air —
But I tell you once and once again, *Macavity's not there!*

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;
You would know him if you saw him, for his eyes are sunken in.
His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head is highly domed;
His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are uncombed.
He sways his head from side to side, with movements like a snake;

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And when you think he's half asleep, he's always wide awake.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by-street, you may see him in the square —
But when a crime's discovered, then *Macavity's not there!*

He's outwardly respectable. (They say he cheats at cards.)
And his footprints are not found in any file of Scotland Yard's.
And when the larder's looted, or the jewel-case is rifled,
Or when the milk is missing, or another Peke's been stifled,
Or the greenhouse glass is broken, and the trellis past repair —
Ay, there's the wonder of the thing! *Macavity's not there!*

And when the Foreign Office find a Treaty's gone astray,
Or the Admiralty lose some plans and drawings by the way,
There may be a scrap of paper in the hall or on the stair —
But it's useless to investigate — Macavity's not there!
And when the loss has been disclosed, the Secret Service say:
"It *must* have been Macavity!" — but he's a mile away.
You'll be sure to find him resting, or a-licking of his thumbs,
Or engaged in doing complicated long division sums.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
There never was a Cat of such deceitfulness and suavity.
He always has an alibi, and one or two to spare:
At whatever time the deed took place — *MACAVITY WASN'T THERE!*
And they say that all the Cats whose wicked deeds are widely known,
(I might mention Mungojerrie, I might mention Griddlebone)
Are nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time
Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!

PRIZE-WINNING STORIES

In this issue we are granted a rare privilege — to offer you two prize-winning stories written by a husband and wife . . . not, we hasten to say, a husband-and-wife team, like Frances and Richard Lockridge, or Kelley Roos. No, this husband and wife are separate and distinct writers, each with an enviable reputation in the mystery field.

The time-honored tradition of gallantry dictates that we present the wife first. This is Margaret Millar's first appearance in EQMM — a happy occasion, indeed. You will remember at least two of Mrs. Millar's mystery novels — WALL OF EYES *and* THE IRON GATES *— both considered close to classics in the genre. Mrs. Millar has revealed that she started reading mysteries when she was eight years old. In 1941 — in her twenties — she was put to bed for an imaginary heart ailment. For two solid weeks she read four mysteries a day, and then like S. S. Van Dine under comparable circumstances, she decided to write one. Actually, she rewrote it twice — but it sold immediately! Whereupon, she recollects, she rose from her "sick" bed, and although her doctor's heart was considerably shaken, her own heart was fine!*

Today Mr. and Mrs. Millar live in Santa Barbara, California — perhaps the best place in the world, they both think, to work (which for the two of them means to write), and to raise children, dogs, and hamsters — to say nothing of the unlimited opportunities Santa Barbara affords to swim and mountain-gaze, two of the Millars' favorite sports.

Oh, we haven't yet introduced Mr. Millar! His first name is Kenneth, but mystery fans know him better under his pseudonym. We will tell you Mr. Millar's more famous writing name after you have finished his wife's story . . .

THE COUPLE NEXT DOOR

by MARGARET MILLAR

IT WAS BY ACCIDENT THAT THEY lived next door to each other, but by design that they became neighbors — Mr. Sands, who had retired to California after a life of crime investigation, and the Rackhams, Charles and Alma. Rackham was a big, innocent-looking man in his fifties. Except

for the accumulation of a great deal of money, nothing much had ever happened to Rackham, and he liked to listen to Sands talk, while Alma sat with her knitting, plump and contented, unimpressed by any tale that had no direct bearing on her own life. She was half Rackham's age, but the fullness of her figure, and her air of having withdrawn from life quietly and without fuss, gave her the stamp of middle-age.

Two or three times a week Sands crossed the concrete driveway, skirted the eugenia hedge, and pressed the Rackhams' door chime. He stayed for tea or for dinner, to play gin or scrabble, or just to talk. "That reminds me of a case I had in Toronto," Sands would say, and Rackham would produce martinis and an expression of intense interest, and Alma would smile tolerantly, as if she didn't really believe a single thing Sands, or anyone else, ever said.

They made good neighbors: the Rackhams, Charles younger than his years, and Alma older than hers, and Sands who could be any age at all . . .

It was the last evening of August and through the open window of Sands' study came the scent of jasmine and the sound of a woman's harsh, wild weeping.

He thought at first that the Rackhams had a guest, a woman on a crying jag, perhaps, after a quarrel with her husband.

He went out into the front yard to listen, and Rackman came around the hedge, dressed in a bathrobe.

He said, sounding very surprised, "Alma's crying."

"I heard."

"I asked her to stop. I begged her. She won't tell me what's the matter."

"Women have cried before."

"Not Alma." Rackham stood on the damp grass, shivering, his forehead streaked with sweat. "What do you think we should do about it?"

The *I* had become *we*, because they were good neighbors, and along with the games and the dinners and the scent of jasmine, they shared the sound of a woman's grief.

"Perhaps you could talk to her," Rackham said.

"I'll try."

"I don't think there is anything physically the matter with her. We both had a check-up at the Tracy clinic last week. George Tracy is a good friend of mine — he'd have told me if there was anything wrong."

"I'm sure he would."

"If anything ever happened to Alma I'd kill myself."

Alma was crouched in a corner of the davenport in the living room, weeping rhythmically, methodically, as if she had accumulated a hoard of tears and must now spend them all in one night. Her fair skin was blotched with patches of red, like strawberry birthmarks, and her eyelids were blistered from the heat of her tears. She looked like a stranger to Sands, who had never seen her display any emotion stronger than ladylike distress over a broken teacup.

Rackham went over and stroked her hair. "Alma, dear. What is the matter?"

"Nothing . . . nothing . . ."

"Mr. Sands is here, Alma. I thought he might be able — we might be able —"

But no one was able. With a long shuddering sob, Alma got up and lurched across the room, hiding her blotched face with her hands. They heard her stumble up the stairs.

Sands said, "I'd better be going."

"No, please don't. I — the fact is, I'm scared. I'm scared stiff. Alma's always been so quiet."

"I know that."

"You don't suppose — there's no chance she's losing her mind?"

If they had not been good neighbors Sands might have remarked that Alma had little mind to lose. As it was, he said cautiously, "She might have had bad news, family trouble of some kind."

"She has no family except me."

"If you're worried, perhaps you'd better call your doctor."

"I think I will."

George Tracy arrived within half an hour, a slight, fair-haired man in his early thirties, with a smooth unhurried manner that imparted confidence. He talked slowly, moved slowly, as if there was all the time in the world to minister to desperate women.

Rackham chafed with impatience while Tracy removed his coat, placed it carefully across the back of the chair, and discussed the weather with Sands.

"It's a beautiful evening," Tracy said, and Alma's moans sliding down the stairs distorted his words, altered their meaning: *a terrible evening, an awful evening.* "There's a touch of fall in the air. You live in these parts, Mr. Sands?"

"Next door."

"For heaven's sake, George," Rackham said, "will you hurry up? For all you know, Alma might be dying."

"That I doubt. People don't die as easily as you might imagine. She's in her room?"

"Yes. Now will you *please* —"

"Take it easy, old man."

Tracy picked up his medical bag and went towards the stairs, leisurely, benign.

"He's always like that." Rackham turned to Sands, scowling. "Exasperating son-of-a-gun. You can bet that if he had a wife in Alma's condition he'd be taking those steps three at a time."

"Who knows? — perhaps he has."

"*I* know," Rackham said crisply. "He's not even married. Never had time for it, he told me. He doesn't look it but he's very ambitious."

"Most doctors are."

"Tracy is, anyway."

Rackham mixed a pitcher of martinis, and the two men sat in front of the unlit fire, waiting and listening. The noises from upstairs gradually ceased, and pretty soon the doctor came down again.

Rackham rushed across the room to meet him. "How is she?"

"Sleeping. I gave her a hypo."

"Did you talk to her? Did you ask her what was the matter?"

"She was in no condition to answer questions."

"Did you find anything wrong with her?"

"Not physically. She's a healthy young woman."

"Not *physically*. Does that mean —?"

"Take it easy, old man."

Rackham was too concerned with Alma to notice Tracy's choice of words, but Sands noticed, and wondered if it had been conscious or unconscious: Alma's a healthy young woman . . . Take it easy, old man.

"If she's still depressed in the morning," Tracy said, "bring her down to the clinic with you when you come in for your X-rays. We have a good neurologist on our staff." He reached for his coat and hat. "By the way, I hope you followed the instructions."

Rackham looked at him stupidly. "What instructions?"

"Before we can take specific X-rays, certain medication is necessary."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"I made it very clear to Alma," Tracy said, sounding annoyed. "You were to take one ounce of sodium phosphate after dinner tonight, and report to the X-ray department at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning without breakfast."

"She didn't tell me."

"Oh."

"It must have slipped her mind."

"Yes. Obviously. Well, it's too late now." He put on his coat, moving quickly for the first time, as if he were in a rush to get away. The change made Sands curious. He wondered why Tracy was suddenly so anxious to leave, and whether there was any connection between Alma's hysteria and her lapse of memory about Rackham's X-rays. He looked at Rackham and guessed, from his pallor and his worried eyes, that Rackham had already made a connection in his mind.

"I understood," Rackham said carefully, "that I was all through at the clinic. My heart, lungs, metabolism — everything fit as a fiddle."

"People," Tracy said, "are not fiddles. Their tone doesn't improve with age. I will make another appointment for you and send you specific instructions by mail. Is that all right with you?"

"I guess it will have to be."

"Well, good night, Mr. Sands, pleasant meeting you." And to Rackham, "Good night, old man."

When he had gone, Rackham leaned against the wall, breathing hard. Sweat crawled down the sides of his face like worms and hid in the collar of his bathrobe. "You'll have to forgive me, Sands. I feel — I'm not feeling very well."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes," Rackham said. "Turn back the clock."

"Beyond my powers, I'm afraid."

"Yes . . . Yes, I'm afraid."

"Good night, Rackham." *Good night, old man.*

"Good night, Sands." *Good night old man to you, too.*

Sands shuffled across the concrete driveway, his head bent. It was a dark night, with no moon at all.

From his study Sands could see the lighted windows of Rackham's bedroom. Rackham's shadow moved back and forth behind the blinds as if seeking escape from the very light that gave it existence. Back and forth, in search of nirvana.

Sands read until far into the night. It was one of the solaces of growing old — if the hours were numbered, at least fewer of them need be wasted in sleep. When he went to bed, Rackham's bedroom light was still on.

They had become good neighbors by design; now, also by design, they became strangers. Whose design it was, Alma's or Rackham's, Sands didn't know.

There was no definite break, no unpleasantness. But the eugenia hedge seemed to have grown taller and thicker, and the concrete driveway a mile wide. He saw the Rackhams occasionally; they waved or smiled or said, "Lovely weather," over the backyard fence. But Rackham's smile was thin and painful, Alma waved with a leaden arm, and neither of them cared about the weather. They stayed indoors most of the time, and when they did come out they were always together, arm in arm, walking slowly and in step. It was impossible to tell whose step led, and whose followed.

At the end of the first week in September, Sands met Alma by accident in a drug store downtown. It was the first time since the night of the doctor's visit that he'd seen either of the Rackhams alone.

She was waiting at the prescription counter wearing a flowery print dress that emphasized the fullness of her figure and the bovine expression of her face. A drug-store length away, she looked like a rather dull, badly dressed young woman with a passion for starchy foods, and it was hard to understand what Rackham had seen in her. But then Rackham had never stood a drug-store length away from Alma; he saw her only in close-up, the surprising, intense blue of her eyes, and the color and texture of her skin, like whipped cream. Sands wondered whether it was her skin and eyes, or her quality of serenity which had appealed most to Rackham, who was quick and nervous and excitable.

She said, placidly, "Why, hello there."

"Hello, Alma."

"Lovely weather, isn't it?"

"Yes. . . . How is Charles?"

"You must come over for dinner one of these nights."

"I'd like to."

"Next week, perhaps. I'll give you a call — I must run now, Charles is waiting for me. See you next week."

But she did not run, she walked; and Charles was not waiting for her, he was waiting for Sands. He had let himself into Sands' house and was pacing the floor of the study, smoking a cigarette. His color was bad, and he had lost weight, but he seemed to have acquired an inner calm. Sands could not tell whether it was the calm of a

man who had come to an important decision, or that of a man who had reached the end of his rope and had stopped struggling.

They shook hands, firmly, pressing the past week back into shape.

Rackham said, "Nice to see you again, old man."

"I've been here all along."

"Yes. Yes, I know. . . . I had things to do, a lot of thinking to do."

"Sit down. I'll make you a drink."

"No, thanks. Alma will be home shortly, I must be there."

Like a Siamese twin, Sands thought, *separated by a miracle, but returning voluntarily to the fusion — because the fusion was in a vital organ.*

"I understand," Sands said.

Rackham shook his head. "No one can understand, really, but you come very close sometimes, Sands. Very close." His cheeks flushed, like a boy's. "I'm not good at words or expressing my emotions, but I wanted to thank you before we leave, and tell you how much Alma and I have enjoyed your companionship."

"You're taking a trip?"

"Yes. Quite a long one."

"When are you leaving?"

"Today."

"You must let me see you off at the station."

"No, no," Rackham said quickly. "I couldn't think of it. I hate last-minute depot farewells. That's why I came over this afternoon to say goodbye."

"Tell me something of your plans."

"I would if I had any. Everything is rather indefinite. I'm not sure where we'll end up."

"I'd like to hear from you now and then."

"Oh, you'll hear from me, of course." Rackham turned away with an impatient twitch of his shoulders as if he was anxious to leave, anxious to start the trip right now before anything happened to prevent it.

"I'll miss you both," Sands said. "We've had a lot of laughs together."

Rackham scowled out of the window. "Please, no farewell speeches. They might shake my decision. My mind is already made up, I want no second thoughts."

"Very well."

"I must go now. Alma will be wondering —"

"I saw Alma earlier this afternoon," Sands said.

"Oh?"

"She invited me for dinner next week."

Outside the open window two hummingbirds fought and fussed, darting with crazy accuracy in and out of the bougainvillea vine.

"Alma," Rackham said carefully, "can be very forgetful sometimes."

"Not that forgetful. She doesn't know about this trip you've planned, does she? . . . Does she, Rackham?"

"I wanted it to be a surprise. She's always had a desire to see the world. She's still young enough to believe that one place is different from any other place. . . . You and I know better."

"Do we?"

"Good bye, Sands."

At the front door they shook hands again, and Rackham again promised to write, and Sands promised to answer his letters. Then Rackham crossed the lawn and the concrete driveway, head bent, shoulders hunched. He didn't look back as he turned the corner of the eugenia hedge.

Sands went over to his desk, looked up a number in the telephone directory, and dialed.

A girl's voice answered, "Tracy clinic, X-ray department."

"This is Charles Rackham," Sands said.

"Yes, Mr. Rackham."

"I'm leaving town unexpectedly. If you'll tell me the amount of my bill I'll send you a check before I go."

"The bill hasn't gone through, but the standard price for a lower gastro-intestinal is twenty-five dollars."

"Let's see, I had that done on the —"

"The fifth. Yesterday."

"But my original appointment was for the first, wasn't it?"

The girl gave a does-it-really-matter sigh. "Just a moment, sir, and I'll check." Half a minute later she was back on the line. "We have no record of an appointment for you on the first, sir."

"You're sure of that?"

"Even without the record book, I'd be sure. The first was a Monday. We do only gall bladders on Monday."

"Oh. Thank you."

Sands went out and got into his car. Before he pulled away from the curb he looked over at Rackham's house and saw Rackham pacing up and down the veranda, waiting for Alma.

The Tracy clinic was less impressive than Sands had expected, a converted two-story stucco house with a red tile roof. Some of the tiles were broken and the whole building needed paint, but the furnishings inside were smart and expensive.

At the reception desk a nurse wearing a crew cut and a professional smile told Sands that Dr. Tracy was booked solid for the entire afternoon. The only chance of seeing him was to sit in the second-floor waiting room and catch him between patients.

Sands went upstairs and took a chair in a little alcove at the end of the hall, near Tracy's door. He sat with his face half hidden behind an open magazine. After a while the door of Tracy's office opened and over the top of his magazine Sands saw a woman silhouetted in the door frame — a plump, fair-haired young woman in a flowery print dress.

Tracy followed her into the hall and the two of them stood looking at each other in silence. Then Alma turned and walked away, passing Sands without seeing him because her eyes were blind with tears.

Sands stood up. "Dr. Tracy?"

Tracy turned sharply, surprise and annoyance pinching the corners of his mouth. "Well? Oh, it's Mr. Sands."

"May I see you a moment?"

"I have quite a full schedule this afternoon."

"This is an emergency."

"Very well. Come in."

They sat facing each other across Tracy's desk.

"You look pretty fit," Tracy said with a wry smile, "for an emergency case."

"The emergency is not mine. It may be yours."

"If it's mine, I'll handle it alone, without the help of a poli — I'll handle it myself."

Sands leaned forward. "Alma has told you, then, that I used to be a policeman."

"She mentioned it in passing."

"I saw Alma leave a few minutes ago. . . . She'd be quite a nice-looking woman if she learned to dress properly."

"Clothes are not important in a woman," Tracy said, with a slight flush. "Besides, I don't care to discuss my patients."

"Alma is a patient of yours?"

"Yes."

"Since the night Rackham called you when she was having hysterics?"

"Before then."

Sands got up, went to the window, and looked down at the street.

People were passing, children were playing on the sidewalk, the sun shone, the palm trees rustled with wind — everything outside seemed normal and human and real. By contrast, the shape of the idea that was forming in the back of his mind was so grotesque and ugly that he wanted to run out of the office, to join the normal people passing on the street below. But he knew he could not escape by running. The idea would follow him, pursue him until he turned around and faced it.

It moved inside his brain like a vast wheel, and in the middle of the wheel, impassive, immobile, was Alma.

Tracy's harsh voice interrupted the turning of the wheel. "Did you come here to inspect my view, Mr. Sands?"

"Let's say, instead, your viewpoint."

"I'm a busy man. You're wasting my time."

"No. I'm giving you time."

"To do what?"

"Think things over."

"If you don't leave my office immediately, I'll have you thrown out." Tracy glanced at the telephone but he didn't reach for it, and there was no conviction in his voice.

"Perhaps you shouldn't have let me in. Why did you?"

"I thought you might make a fuss if I didn't."

"Fusses aren't in my line." Sands turned from the window. "Liars are, though."

"What are you implying?"

"I've thought a great deal about that night you came to the Rackhams' house. In retrospect, the whole thing appeared too pat, too contrived: Alma had hysterics and you were called in to treat her. Natural enough, so far."

Tracy stirred but didn't speak.

"The interesting part came later. You mentioned casually to Rackham that he had an appointment for some X-rays to be taken the following

day, September the first. It was assumed that Alma had forgotten to tell him. Only Alma *hadn't* forgotten. There was nothing to forget. I checked with your X-ray department half an hour ago. They have no record of any appointment for Rackham on September the first."

"Records get lost."

"This record wasn't lost. It never existed. You lied to Rackham. The lie itself wasn't important, it was the *kind* of lie. I could have understood a lie of vanity, or one to avoid punishment or to gain profit. But this seemed such a silly, senseless, little lie. It worried me. I began to wonder about Alma's part in the scene that night. Her crying was most unusual for a woman of Alma's inert nature. What if her crying was also a lie? And what was to be gained by it?"

"Nothing," Tracy said wearily. "Nothing was gained."

"But something was *intended* — and I think I know what it was. The scene was played to worry Rackham, to set him up for an even bigger scene. If that next scene has already been played, I am wasting my time here. Has it?"

"You have a vivid imagination."

"No. The plan was yours — I only figured it out."

"Very poor figuring, Mr. Sands." But Tracy's face was gray, as if mold had grown over his skin.

"I wish it were. I had become quite fond of the Rackhams."

He looked down at the street again, seeing nothing but the wheel turning inside his head. Alma was no longer in the middle of the wheel, passive and immobile; she was revolving with the others — Alma and Tracy and Rackham, turning as the wheel turned, clinging to its perimeter.

Alma, devoted wife, a little on the dull side. . . . What sudden passion of hate or love had made her capable of such consummate deceit? Sands imagined the scene the morning after Tracy's visit to the house. Rackham, worried and exhausted after a sleepless night: "*Are you feeling better now, Alma?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*What made you cry like that?*"

"*I was worried.*"

"*About me?*"

"*Yes.*"

"*Why didn't you tell me about my X-ray appointment?*"

"*I couldn't. I was frightened. I was afraid they would discover something serious the matter with you.*"

"*Did Tracy give you any reason to think that?*"

"*He mentioned something about a blockage. Oh, Charles, I'm scared! If anything ever happened to you, I'd die. I couldn't live without you!*"

For an emotional and sensitive man like Rackman, it was a perfect set-up: his devoted wife was frightened to the point of hysterics, his good friend and physician had given her reason to be frightened. Rackham was ready for the next step. . . .

"According to the records in your X-ray department," Sands said, "Rackham had a lower gastrointestinal X-

ray yesterday morning. What was the result?"

"Medical ethics forbid me to —"

"You can't hide behind a wall of medical ethics that's already full of holes. What was the result?"

There was a long silence before Tracy spoke. "Nothing."

"You found nothing the matter with him?"

"That's right."

"Have you told Rackman that?"

"He came in earlier this afternoon, alone."

"Why alone?"

"I didn't want Alma to hear what I had to say."

"Very considerate of you."

"No, it was not considerate," Tracy said dully. "I had decided to back out of our — our agreement — and I didn't want her to know just yet."

"The agreement was to lie to Rackham, convince him that he had a fatal disease?"

"Yes."

"Did you?"

"No. I showed him the X-rays, I made it clear that there was nothing wrong with him. . . . I tried. I tried my best. It was no use."

"What do you mean?"

"He wouldn't believe me! He thought I was trying to keep the real truth from him." Tracy drew in his breath, sharply. "It's funny, isn't it? — after days of indecision and torment I made up my mind to do the right thing. But it was too late. Alma had played her role too well. She's the only one Rackham will believe."

The telephone on Tracy's desk began to ring but he made no move to answer it, and pretty soon the ringing stopped and the room was quiet again.

Sands said, "Have you asked Alma to tell him the truth?"

"Yes, just before you came in."

"She refused?"

Tracy didn't answer.

"She wants him to think he is fatally ill?"

"I — yes."

"In the hope that he'll kill himself, perhaps?"

Once again Tracy was silent. But no reply was necessary.

"I think Alma miscalculated," Sands said quietly. "Instead of planning suicide, Rackham is planning a trip. But before he leaves, he's going to hear the truth — from you and from Alma." Sands went towards the door. "Come on, Tracy. You have a house call to make."

"No. I can't." Tracy grasped the desk with both hands, like a child resisting the physical force of removal by a parent. "I won't go."

"You have to."

"No! Rackham will ruin me if he finds out. That's how this whole thing started. We were afraid, Alma and I, afraid of what Rackham would do if she asked him for a divorce. He's crazy in love with her, he's obsessed!"

"And so are you?"

"Not the way he is. Alma and I both want the same things — a little peace, a little quiet together. We are alike in many ways."

"That I can believe," Sands said

grimly. "You wanted the same things, a little peace, a little quiet — and a little of Rackham's money?"

"The money was secondary."

"A very close second. How did you plan on getting it?"

Tracy shook his head from side to side, like an animal in pain. "You keep referring to plans, ideas, schemes. We didn't start out with plans or schemes. We just fell in love. We've been in love for nearly a year, not daring to do anything about it because I knew how Rackham would react if we told him. I have worked hard to build up this clinic; Rackham could destroy it, and me, within a month."

"That's a chance you'll have to take. Come on, Tracy."

Sands opened the door and the two men walked down the hall, slowly and in step, as if they were handcuffed together.

A nurse in uniform met them at the top of the stairs. "Dr. Tracy, are you ready for your next —"?

"Cancel all my appointments, Miss Leroy."

"But that's imposs —"

"I have a very important house call to make."

"Will it take long?"

"I don't know."

The two men went down the stairs, past the reception desk, and out into the summer afternoon. Before he got into Sands' car, Tracy looked back at the clinic, as if he never expected to see it again.

Sands turned on the ignition and the car sprang forward.

After a time Tracy said, "Of all the people in the world who could have been at the Rackham's that night, it had to be an ex-policeman."

"It's lucky for you that I was."

"Lucky." Tracy let out a harsh little laugh. "What's lucky about financial ruin?"

"It's better than some other kinds of ruin. If your plan had gone through, you could never have felt like a decent man again."

"You think I will anyway?"

"Perhaps, as the years go by."

"The years." Tracy turned, with a sigh. "What are you going to tell Rackham?"

"Nothing. You will tell him yourself."

"I can't. You don't understand, I'm quite fond of Rackham, and so is Alma. We — it's hard to explain."

"Even harder to understand." Sands thought back to all the times he had seen the Rackhams together and envied their companionship, their mutual devotion. Never, by the slightest glance or gesture of impatience or slip of the tongue, had Alma indicated that she was passionately in love with another man. He recalled the games of scrabble, the dinners, the endless conversations with Rackham, while Alma sat with her knitting, her face reposeful, content. Rackham would ask, "Don't you want to play too, Alma?" And she would reply, "No, thank you, dear, I'm quite happy with my thoughts."

Alma, happy with her thoughts of violent delights and violent ends.

Sands said, "Alma is equally in love with you?"

"Yes." He sounded absolutely convinced. "No matter what Rackham says or does, we intend to have each other."

"I see."

The blinds of the Rackham house were closed against the sun. Sands led the way up the veranda steps and pressed the door chime, while Tracy stood, stony-faced and erect, like a bill collector or a process server.

Sands could hear the chimes pealing inside the house and feel their vibrations beating under his feet.

He said, "They may have gone already."

"Gone where?"

"Rackham wouldn't tell me. He just said he was planning the trip as a surprise for Alma."

"He can't take her away! He can't force her to leave if she doesn't want to go!"

Sands pressed the door chime again, and called out, "Rackham? Alma?" But there was no response.

He wiped the sudden moisture off his forehead with his coat sleeve. "I'm going in."

"I'm coming with you."

"No."

The door was unlocked. He stepped into the empty hall and shouted up the staircase, "Alma? Rackham? Are you there?"

The echo of his own voice teased him from the dim corners.

Tracy had come into the hall. "They've left, then?"

"Perhaps not. They might have just gone out for a drive. It's a nice day for a drive."

"Is it?"

"Go around to the back and see if their car's in the garage."

When Tracy had gone, Sands closed the door behind him and shot the bolt. He stood for a moment listening to Tracy's nervous footsteps on the concrete driveway. Then he turned and walked slowly into the living room, knowing the car would be in the garage, no matter how nice a day it was for a drive.

The drapes were pulled tight across the windows and the room was cool and dark, but alive with images and noisy with the past:

"*I wanted to thank you before we leave, Sands.*"

"*You're taking a trip?*"

"*Yes, quite a long one.*"

"*When are you leaving?*"

"*Today.*"

"*You must let me see you off at the station. . . .*"

But no station had been necessary for Rackham's trip. He lay in front of the fireplace in a pool of blood, and beside him was his companion on the journey, her left arm curving around his waist.

Rackham had kept his promise to write. The note was on the mantel, addressed not to Sands, but to Tracy.

"Dear George:

You did your best to fool me but I got the truth from Alma. She could never hide anything from me, we are

too close to each other. This is the easiest way out. I am sorry that I must take Alma along, but she has told me so often that she could not live without me. I cannot leave her behind to grieve.

Think of us now and then, and try not to judge me too harshly.

Charles Rackham."

Sands put the note back on the mantel. He stood quietly, his heart pierced by the final splinter of irony: before Rackham had used the gun on himself, he had lain down on the floor beside Alma and placed her dead arm lovingly around his waist.

From outside came the sound of Tracy's footsteps and then the pounding of his fists on the front door.

"Sands, I'm locked out. Open the door. Let me in! Sands, do you hear me? Open this door!"

Sands went and opened the door.

Kenneth Millar is better known to mystery fans as John Ross Macdonald, considered by many critics, if not most of them, as one of the finest practitioners of the hardboiled school since the "golden days" of Hammett and Chandler. Mr. Macdonald's prize-winning story in last year's contest — "Wild Goose Chase" — is not the first of his stories to appear in EQMM. 'Way back in our very first annual contest — eight years ago — Mr. Macdonald, signing himself by his real name, won a prize for "Find the Woman" — a hardboileder that was more than a run-of-the-murder tough 'tec, that had overtones and undertones not usually found in the realistic school. And now, with his new prize-winner, Mr. Macdonald again goes beyond the sheer sensationalism of the guts-gore-and-gals gambit. True, you will find the underlining of sex, the strong implication of violence and action, the cynicism that so often lacquers the characters in blood-bust-and-bludgeon capers. In a phrase, Mr. Macdonald's story about private-eye Lew Archer is tough and terse, clipped and compressed — but it is also more than that. For example — and this is not at all inconsistent with the hardboiled school — it has its moments of poetry. We usually think of poetry as soft and sentimental — the antithesis of the gusty, gutsy genre. Perhaps that is true; but you will find in Mr. Macdonald's tough, restrained yarn such lines as: "We turned towards the sea, which glimmered at the foot of the town like a fallen piece of sky."

As different as their stories are — in tone, approach, intent — Mr. and Mrs. Millar have much in common. They are both, it seems almost need-

less to point out, utterly sincere, and their integrity lights up both prize-winning stories, each in its own luminescence. Perhaps this is true because both husband and wife are deeply interested in psychiatry. Neither wishes to write as a scientist — they both write fiction, not case histories; but their fiction aims at imaginative rather than scientific truth — the kind of truth, both of them agree, that explains why people do the things they do.

WILD GOOSE CHASE

by JOHN ROSS MACDONALD

THE PLANE TURNED IN TOWARDS the shoreline and began to lose altitude. Mountains detached themselves from the blue distance. Then there was a city between the sea and the mountains, a little city made of sugar cubes. The cubes increased in size. Cars crawled like colored beetles between the buildings, and matchstick figures hustled jerkily along the white morning pavements. A few minutes later I was one of them.

The woman who had telephoned me was waiting at the airport, as she had promised. She climbed out of her Cadillac when I appeared at the entrance to the waiting room, and took a few tentative steps towards me. In spite of her height and her blondeness, the dark harlequin glasses she wore gave her an oddly Oriental look.

"You must be Mr. Archer."

I said I was, and waited for her to complete the exchange of names — she hadn't given me her name on the telephone. All she had given me, in fact, was an urgent request to catch the first plane north, and assurances that I would be paid for my time.

She sensed what I was waiting for. "I'm sorry to be so mysterious. I really can't afford to tell you my name. I'm taking quite a risk in coming here at all."

I looked her over carefully, trying to decide whether this was another wild goose chase. Although she was well-groomed in a sharkskin suit, her hair and face were slightly disarranged, as if a storm had struck her a glancing blow. She took off her glasses to wipe them. I could see that the storm was inside of her, roiling the blue-green color of her eyes.

"What's the problem?" I said.

She stood wavering between me and her car, beaten by surges of sound from the airfield where my plane was about to take off again. Behind her, in the Cadillac's front seat, a little girl with the coloring of a Dresden doll was sitting as still as one. The woman glanced at the child and moved farther away from the car:

"I don't want Janie to hear. She's only three-and-a-half but she under-

stands a great deal." She took a deep gasping breath, like a swimmer about to dive. "There's a man on trial for murder here. They claim he murdered his wife."

"Glenway Cave?"

Her whole body moved with surprise. "You know him?"

"No, I've been following the trial in the papers."

"Then you know he's testifying today. He's probably on the witness stand right now." Her voice was somber, as if she could see the courtroom in her mind's eye.

"Is Mr. Cave a friend of yours?"

She bit her lip. "Let's say that I'm an interested observer."

"And you don't believe he's guilty."

"Did I say that?"

"By implication. You said they *claim* he murdered his wife."

"You have an alert ear, haven't you? Anyway, what I believe doesn't matter. It's what the jury believes. Do you think they'll acquit him?"

"It's hard to form an opinion without attending the trial. But the average jury has a prejudice against the idea of blowing off your wife's head with a twelve-gauge shotgun. I'd say he stands a good chance of going to the gas chamber."

"The gas chamber." Her nostrils dilated, and she paled, as if she had caught a whiff of the fatal stuff. "Do you seriously think there's any danger of that?"

"They've built a powerful case against him. Motive. Opportunity. Weapon."

"What motive?"

"His wife was wealthy, wasn't she? I understand Cave isn't. They were alone in the house: the housekeeping couple were away for the weekend. The shotgun belonged to Cave, and according to the chemical test his driving gloves were used to fire it."

"You *have* been following the trial."

"As well as I could from Los Angeles. Of course you get distortions in the newspapers. It makes a better story if he looks guilty."

"He isn't guilty," she said in a quiet voice.

"Do you know that, or merely hope it?"

She pressed one hand across her mouth. The fingernails were bitten down to the quick. "We won't go into that."

"Do you know who murdered Ruth Cave?"

"No. Of course not."

"Am I supposed to try and find out who did?"

"Wouldn't that be very difficult, since it happened so long ago? Anyway, it doesn't really matter to me. I barely knew the woman." Her thoughts veered back to Cave. "Won't a great deal depend on the impression he makes on the witness stand?"

"It usually does in a murder trial."

"You've seen a lot of them, haven't you?"

"Too many. I take it I'm going to see another."

"Yes." She spoke sharply and definitely, leaning forward. "I don't dare go myself. I want you to observe

the jurors, see how Glen — how Mr. Cave's testimony affects them. And tell me if you think he's going to get off."

"What if I can't tell?"

"You'll have to give me a yes or no." Her breast nudged my arm. She was too intent on what she was saying to notice. "I've made up my mind to go by your decision."

"Go where?" I said.

"To hell if necessary — if his life is really in danger."

"I'll do my best. Where shall I get in touch with you?"

"I'll get in touch with you. I've made a reservation for you at the Rubio Inn. Right now I'll drop you at the courthouse. Oh, yes — the money." She opened her leather handbag, and I caught the gleam of a blue revolver at the bottom of the bag. "How much?"

"A hundred dollars will do."

A few bills changed hands, and we went to the car. She indicated the right rear door. I went around to the left so that I could read the white slip on the steering column. But the leatherette holder was empty.

The little girl stood up in the front seat and leaned over the back of it to look at me. "Hello. Are you my daddy?" Her eyes were as blue and candid as the sky.

Before I could answer, her mother said: "Now Janie, you know he isn't your daddy. This is Mr. Archer."

"Where is my daddy?"

"In Pasadena, darling. You know that. Sit down, Janie, and be still."

The little girl slid down out of my sight. The engine roared in anger . . .

It was ten minutes past 11 by the clock on the courthouse tower. Superior Court was on the second floor. I slid into one of the vacant seats in the back row of the spectators' section. Several old ladies turned to glare at me, as though I had interrupted a church service.

The trial was more like an ancient tribal ceremony in a grotto. Red drapes were drawn over the lofty windows. The air was dim with human exhalations. Black iron fixtures suspended from the ceiling shed a wan light on the judge's gray head, and on the man on the witness stand.

I recognized Glenway Cave from his newspaper pictures. He was a big handsome man in his early thirties who had once been bigger and handsomer. Four months in jail waiting for trial had pared him down to the bone. His eyes were pressed deep into hollow sockets. His double-breasted gabardine suit hung loosely on his shoulders. He looked like a suitable victim for the ceremony.

A broad-backed man with a straw-colored crewcut was bent over the stenograph, talking in an inaudible voice to the court reporter. Harvey, chief attorney for the defense. I had met Rod Harvey several times in the course of my work, which was one reason why I had followed the trial so closely.

The judge chopped the air with his hatchet face: "Proceed with your examination, Mr. Harvey."

Harvey raised his clipped blond head and addressed the witness: "Mr. Cave, we were attempting to establish the reason behind your — ah — misunderstanding with your wife. Did you and Mrs. Cave have words on the evening of May nineteenth?"

"We did. I've already told you that." Cave's voice was shallow, with high-pitched overtones.

"What was the nature of the conversation?"

"It was more of an argument than a conversation."

"But a purely verbal argument?" Harvey sounded as if his own witness had taken him by surprise.

A sharp-faced man spoke up from the prosecution end of the attorneys' table. "Objection. The question is leading — not to say *mis*leading."

"Sustained. The question will be stricken."

Harvey shrugged his heavy tweed shoulders. "Tell us just what was said then, Mr. Cave. Beginning at the beginning."

Cave moved uncomfortably, passing the palm of one hand over his eyes. "I can't recall it *verbatim*. It was quite an emotional scene —"

Harvey cut him off. "Tell us in your own words what you and Mrs. Cave were talking about."

"The future," Cave said. "Our future. Ruth was planning to leave me for another man."

An insect-buzzing rose from the spectators. I looked along the row where I was sitting. A couple of seats to my right, a young woman with artificial violets at her waist was leaning forward, her bright dark eyes intent on Cave's face. She seemed out of place among the frowsy old furies who surrounded her. Her head was striking, small and boyishly chic, its fine bony structure emphasized by a short haircut. She turned, and her brown eyes met mine. They were tragic and opaque.

The D.A.'s voice rose above the buzzing. "I object to this testimony. The witness is deliberately blackening the dead woman's reputation, without corroborative evidence of any kind, in a cowardly attempt to save his own neck."

He glanced sideways at the jury. Their faces were stony. Cave's was as white as marble. Harvey's was mottled red. He said, "This is an essential part of the case for the defense. A great deal has been made of Mr. Cave's sudden departure from home on the day of his wife's death. I am establishing the reason for it."

"We know the reason," the D.A. said in a carrying undertone.

Harvey looked up mutely at the judge, whose frown fitted the lines in his face like an old glove.

"Objection overruled. The prosecution will refrain from making unworthy comments. In any case, the jury will disregard them."

But the D.A. looked pleased with himself. He had made his point, and the jury would remember. Their twenty-four eyes, half female and predominantly old, were fixed on Cave in uniform disapproval.

Harvey spoke in a voice thickened by emotion. "Did your wife say who the man was that she planned to leave you for?"

"No. She didn't."

"Do you know who it was?"

"No. The whole thing was a bolt from the blue to me. I don't believe Ruth intended to tell me what she had on her mind. It just slipped out, after we started fighting." He caught himself up short. "Verbally fighting, I mean."

"What started this verbal argument?"

"Nothing important. Money trouble. I wanted to buy a Ferrari, and Ruth couldn't see any sense in it."

"A Ferrari motor car?"

"A racing car, yes. I asked her for the money. She said that she was tired of giving me money. I said that I was equally tired of taking it from her. Then it came out that she was going to leave me for somebody else." One side of Cave's mouth lifted in a sardonic smile. "Somebody who would love her for herself."

"When did she plan to leave you?"

"As soon as she could get ready to go to Nevada. I told her to go ahead, that she was free to go whenever and wherever she wanted to go, with anybody that suited her."

"And what did you do then?"

"I packed a few clothes and drove away in my car."

"What time did you leave the house?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Was it dark when you went?"

"It was getting dark, but I didn't have to use my headlights right away. It couldn't have been later than eight o'clock."

"And Mrs. Cave was alive and well when you left?"

"Certainly she was."

"Was your parting friendly?"

"Friendly enough. She said goodbye and offered me some money. Which I didn't take, incidentally. I didn't take much of anything, except for bare essentials. I even left most of my clothes behind."

"Why did you do that?"

"Because she bought them for me. They belonged to her. I thought perhaps her new man might have a use for them."

"I see."

Harvey's voice was hoarse and unsteady. He turned away from Cave, and I could see that his face was flushed, either with anger or impatience. He said without looking at the prisoner, "Did the things you left behind include a gun?"

"Yes. A twelve-gauge double-barreled shotgun. I used it for shooting rabbits, mostly, in the hills behind the house."

"Was it loaded?"

"I believe so. I usually kept it loaded."

"Where did you leave your shotgun?"

"In the garage. I kept it there. Ruth didn't like to have a gun in the house. She had a phobia —"

Harvey cut in quickly. "Did you also leave a pair of driving gloves, the

gloves on the table here marked by the prosecution as Exhibit J?"

"I did. They were in the garage, too."

"And the garage door — was it open or closed?"

"I left it open, I think. In any case, we never kept it locked."

"Mr. Cave," Harvey said in a deep voice, "did you kill your wife with the shotgun before you drove away?"

"I did not." In contrast with Harvey's, Cave's voice was high and thin and unconvincing.

"After you left around eight o'clock, did you return to the house again that night?"

"I did not. I haven't been back since, as a matter of fact. I was arrested in Los Angeles the following day."

"Where did you spend the night — that is, after 8 o'clock?"

"With a friend."

The courtroom began to buzz again.

"What friend?" Harvey barked. He suddenly sounded like a prosecutor cross-examining a hostile witness.

Cave moved his mouth to speak, and hesitated. He licked his dry lips. "I prefer not to say."

"Why do you prefer not to say?"

"Because it was a woman. I don't want to involve her in this mess."

Harvey swung away from the witness abruptly and looked up at the judge. The judge admonished the jury not to discuss the case with anyone, and adjourned the trial until 2 o'clock.

I watched the jurors file out. Not one of them looked at Glenway Cave. They had seen enough of him.

Harvey was the last man to leave the well of the courtroom. I waited for him at the little swinging gate which divided it from the spectators' section. He finished packing his briefcase and came towards me, carrying the case as if it was weighted.

"Mr. Harvey. Can you give me a minute?"

He started to brush me off with a weary gesture, then recognized my face. "Lew Archer? What brings you here?"

"It's what I want to talk to you about."

"This case?"

I nodded. "Are you going to get him off?"

"Naturally I am. He's innocent." But his voice echoed hollowly in the empty room and he regarded me doubtfully. "You wouldn't be snooping around for the prosecution?"

"Not this time. The person who hired me believes that Cave is innocent. Just as you do."

"A woman?"

"You're jumping to conclusions, aren't you?"

"When the sex isn't indicated, it's usually a woman. Who is she, Archer?"

"I wish I knew."

"Come on now." His square pink hand rested on my arm. "You don't accept anonymous clients any more than I do."

"This one is an exception. All I know about her is that she's anxious to see Cave get off."

"So are we all." His bland smile tightened. "Look, we can't talk here. Walk over to the office with me. I'll have a couple of sandwiches sent up."

He shifted his hand to my elbow and propelled me towards the door. The dark-eyed woman with the artificial violets at her waist was waiting in the corridor. Her opaque gaze passed over me and rested possessively on Harvey.

"Surprise." Her voice was low and throaty to match her boyish look. "You're taking me to lunch."

"I'm pretty busy, Rhea. And I thought you were going to stay home today."

"I tried to. Honestly. But my mind kept wandering off to the courthouse, so I finally up and followed it." She moved towards him with a queer awkwardness, as if she was embarrassingly conscious of her body, and his. "Aren't you glad to see me, darling?"

"Of course I'm glad to see you," he said, his tone denying the words.

"Then take me to lunch." Her white-gloved hand stroked his lapel. "I made a reservation at the club. It will do you good to get out in the air."

"I told you I'm busy, Rhea. Mr. Archer and I have something to discuss."

"Bring Mr. Archer along. I won't get in the way. I promise." She turned to me with a flashing white smile. "Since my husband seems to have forgotten his manners, I'm Rhea Harvey."

She offered me her hand, and Harvey told her who I was. Shrugging his shoulders resignedly, he led the way outside to his bronze convertible. We turned towards the sea, which glimmered at the foot of the town like a fallen piece of sky.

"How do you think it's going, Rod?" she said.

"I suppose it could have been worse. He could have got up in front of the judge and jury and confessed."

"Did it strike you as that bad?"

"I'm afraid it was pretty bad." Harvey leaned forward over the wheel in order to look around his wife at me. "Were you in on the debacle, Archer?"

"Part of it. He's either very honest or very stupid."

Harvey snorted. "Glen's not stupid. The trouble is, he simply doesn't care. He pays no attention to my advice. I had to stand there and ask the questions, and I didn't know what crazy answers he was going to come up with. He seems to take a masochistic pleasure in wrecking his own chances."

"It could be his conscience working on him," I said.

His steely blue glance raked my face and returned to the road. "It could be, but it isn't. And I'm not speaking simply as his attorney. I've known Glen Cave for a long time. We were room-mates in college. Hell, I introduced him to his wife."

"That doesn't make him incapable of murder."

"Sure, any man is capable of murder. That's not my point. My point is that Glen is a sharp customer. If he

had decided to kill Ruth for her money, he wouldn't do it that way. He wouldn't use his own gun. In fact, I doubt very much that he'd use a gun at all. Glen isn't that obvious."

"Unless it was a passional crime. Jealousy can make a man lose his sophistication."

"Not Glen. He wasn't in love with Ruth — never has been. He's got about as much sexual passion as a flea." His voice was edged with contempt. "Anyway, this tale of his about another man is probably malarkey."

"Are you sure, Rod?"

He turned on his wife almost savagely. "No, I'm not sure. I'm not sure about anything. Glen isn't confiding in me, and I don't see how I can defend him if he goes on this way. I wish to God he hadn't forced me into this. He knows as well as I do that trial work isn't my forte. I advised him to get an attorney experienced in this sort of thing, but he wouldn't listen. He said if I wouldn't take on his case that he'd defend himself. And he flunked out of law school in his second year. What could I do?"

He stamped the accelerator, cutting in and out of the noon traffic on the ocean boulevard. Palm trees fled by like thin old wild-haired madmen racing along the edge of the quicksilver sea.

The beach club stood at the end of the boulevard, a white U-shaped building whose glass doors opened "For Members and Guests Only." Its inner court contained a swimming pool and an alfresco dining space dotted with umbrella tables. Breeze-swept and sluiced with sunlight, it was the antithesis of the dim courtroom where Cave's fate would be decided. But the shadow of the courtroom fell across our luncheon and leeched the color and flavor from the food.

Harvey pushed away his salmon salad, which he had barely disturbed, and gulped a second Martini. He called the waiter to order a third. His wife inhibited him with a barely perceptible shake of her head. The waiter slid away.

"This woman," I said, "the woman he spent the night with. Who is she?"

"Glen hardly told me anything more than he told the court." Harvey paused, half gagged by a lawyer's instinctive reluctance to give away information, then forced himself to go on. "It seems he went straight from home to her house on the night of the shooting. He spent the night with her, from about 8:30 until the following morning. Or so he claims."

"Haven't you checked his story?"

"How? He refused to say anything that might enable me to find her or identify her. It's just another example of the obstacles he's put in my way, trying to defend him."

"Is this woman so important to his defense?"

"Crucial. Ruth was shot sometime around midnight. The p.m. established that through the stomach contents. And at that time, if he's telling the truth, Glen was with a witness. Yet he won't let me try to locate her, or

have her subpoenaed. It took me hours of hammering at him to get him to testify about her at all, and I'm not sure that wasn't a mistake. That miserable jury —" His voice trailed off. He was back in court fighting his uphill battle against the prejudices of a small elderly city.

And I was back on the pavement in front of the airport, listening to a woman's urgent whisper: *You'll have to give me a yes or no. I've made up my mind to go by your decision.*

Harvey was looking away across the captive water, fish-netted with elastic strands of light. Under the clear September sun I could see the spikes of gray in his hair, the deep small scars of strain around his mouth.

"If I could only lay my hands on the woman." He seemed to be speaking to himself, until he looked at me from the corners of his eyes. "Who do *you* suppose she is?"

"How would I know?"

He leaned across the table confidentially. "Why be so cagey, Archer? I've let down my hair."

"This particular hair doesn't belong to me."

I regretted the words before I had finished speaking them.

Harvey said, "When will you see her?"

"You're jumping to conclusions again."

"If I'm wrong, I'm sorry. If I'm right, give her a message for me. Tell her that Glen — I hate to have to say this, but he's in jeopardy. If she likes him well enough to —"

"Please, Rod." Rhea Harvey seemed genuinely offended. "There's no need to be coarse."

I said, "I'd like to talk to Cave before I do anything. I don't know that it's the same woman. Even if it is, he may have reasons of his own for keeping her under wraps."

"You can probably have a few minutes with him in the courtroom." He looked at his wristwatch and pushed his chair back violently. "We better get going. It's twenty to two now."

We went along the side of the pool, back toward the entrance. As we entered the vestibule, a woman was just coming in from the boulevard. She held the heavy plate-glass door for the little flaxen-haired girl who was trailing after her.

Then she glanced up and saw me. Her dark harlequin glasses flashed in the light reflected from the pool. Her face became disorganized behind the glasses. She turned on her heel and started out, but not before the child had smiled at me and said: "Hello. Are you coming for a ride?" Then she trotted out after her mother.

Harvey looked quizzically at his wife. "What's the matter with the Kilpatrick woman?"

"She must be drunk. She didn't even recognize us."

"You know her, Mrs. Harvey?"

"As well as I care to." Her eyes took on a set, glazed expression — the look of congealed virtue faced with its opposite. "I haven't seen Janet Kilpatrick for months. She

hasn't been showing herself in public much since her divorce."

Harvey edged closer and gripped my arm. "Would Mrs. Kilpatrick be the woman we were talking about?"

"Hardly."

"They seemed to know you."

I improvised. "I met them on the Daylight one day last month, coming down from Frisco. She got plastered, and I guess she didn't want to recall the occasion."

That seemed to satisfy him. But when I excused myself, on the grounds that I thought I'd stay for a swim in the pool, his blue ironic glance informed me that he wasn't taken in.

The receptionist had inch-long scarlet fingernails and an air of contemptuous formality. Yes, Mrs. Kilpatrick was a member of the club. No, she wasn't allowed to give out members' addresses. She admitted grudgingly that there was a pay telephone in the bar.

The barroom was deserted except for the bartender, a slim white-coated man with emotional Mediterranean eyes. I found Mrs. Janet Kilpatrick in the telephone directory: her address was 1201 Coast Highway. I called a taxi, and ordered a beer from the bartender.

He was more communicative than the receptionist. Sure, he knew Glenway Cave. Every bartender in town knew Glenway Cave. The guy was sitting at this very bar the afternoon of the same day he murdered his wife.

"You think he murdered her?"

"Everybody else thinks so. They don't spend all that money on a trial unless they got the goods on them. Anyway, look at the motive he had."

"You mean the man she was running around with?"

"I mean two million bucks." He had a delayed reaction. "What man is that?"

"Cave said in court this morning that his wife was going to divorce him and marry somebody else."

"He did, eh? You a newspaperman by any chance?"

"A kind of one." I subscribed to several newspapers.

"Well, you can tell the world that that's a lot of baloney. I've seen quite a bit of Mrs. Cave around the club. She had her own little circle, see, and you can take it from me she never even looked at other guys. *He* was always the one with the roving eye. What can you expect, when a young fellow marries a lady that much older than him?" His faint accent lent flavor to the question. "The very day of the murder he was making a fast play for another dame, right here in front of me."

"Who was she?"

"I wouldn't want to name names. She was pretty far gone that afternoon, hardly knew what she was doing. And the poor lady's got enough trouble as it is. Take it from me."

I didn't press him. A minute later a horn tooted in the street.

A few miles south of the city limits a blacktop lane led down

from the highway to Mrs. Kilpatrick's house. It was a big old-fashioned redwood cottage set among trees and flowers above a bone-white beach. The Cadillac was parked beside the vine-grown verandah, like something in a four-color advertisement. I asked my driver to wait, and knocked on the front door.

A small rectangular window was set into the door. It slid open, and a green eye gleamed like a flawed emerald through the aperture.

"You," she said in a low voice. "You shouldn't have come here."

"I have some questions for you, Mrs. Kilpatrick. And maybe a couple of answers. May I come in?"

She sighed audibly. "If you must." She unlocked the door and stood back to let me enter. "You will be quiet, won't you? I've just put Janie to bed for her afternoon nap."

There was a white silk scarf draped over her right hand, and under the silk a shape which contrasted oddly with her motherly concern — the shape of a small hand gun.

"You'd better put that thing away. You don't need it, do you?"

Her hand moved jerkily. The scarf fell from the gun and drifted to the floor. It was a small blue revolver. She looked at it as if it had somehow forced its way into her fist, and put it down on the telephone table.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know who was at the door. I've been so worried and frightened —"

"Who did you think it was?"

"Frank, perhaps, or one of his men. He's been trying to take Janie away from me. He claims I'm not a fit mother. And maybe I'm not," she added in the neutral tones of despair. "But Frank is worse."

"Frank is your husband?"

"My ex-husband. I got a divorce last year and the court gave me custody of Janie. Frank has been fighting the custody order ever since. Janie's grandmother left her a trust fund, you see. That's all Frank cares about. But I'm her mother."

"I think I see what it's all about," I said. "Correct me if I'm wrong. Cave spent the night with you — the night he was supposed to have shot his wife. But you don't want to testify at his trial. It would give your ex-husband legal ammunition to use in the custody fight for Janie."

"You're not wrong." She lowered her eyes, not so much in shame as in submission to the facts. "We got talking in the bar at the club that afternoon. I hardly knew him, but I — well, I was attracted to him. He asked if he could come and see me that night. I was feeling lonely, very low and lonely. I'd had a good deal to drink. I let him come."

"What time did he arrive?"

"Shortly after 8."

"And he stayed all night?"

"Yes. He couldn't have killed Ruth Cave. He was with me. You can understand why I've been quietly going crazy since they arrested him — sitting at home and biting on my nails and wondering what under heaven I should do." Her eyes came

up like green searchlights under her fair brow. "What *shall* I do, Mr. Archer?"

"Sit tight for a while yet. The trial will last a few more days. And he may be acquitted."

"But you don't think he will be, do you?"

"It's hard to say. He didn't do too well on the stand this morning. On the other hand, the averages are with him, as he seems to realize. Very few innocent men are convicted of murder."

"He didn't mention me on the stand?"

"He said he was with a woman, no names mentioned. Are you two in love with each other, Mrs. Kilpatrick?"

"No, nothing like that. I was simply feeling sorry for myself that night. I needed some attention from a man. He was a piece of flotsam and I was a piece of jetsam and we were washed together in the dark. He did get rather — emotional at one point, and said that he would like to marry me. I reminded him that he had a wife."

"What did he say to that?"

"He said his wife wouldn't live forever. But I didn't take him seriously. I haven't even seen him since that night. No, I'm not in love with him. If I let him die, though, for something I know he didn't do — I couldn't go on living with myself." She added, with a bitter grimace, "It's hard enough as it is."

"But you do want to go on living."

"Not particularly. I have to because Janie needs me."

"Then stay at home and keep your doors locked. It wasn't smart to go to the club today."

"I know. I needed a drink badly. I'm out of liquor, and it was the nearest place. Then I saw you and I panicked."

"Stay panicked. Remember if Cave didn't commit that murder, somebody else did — and framed him for it. Somebody who is still at large. What do you drink, by the way?"

"Anything. Scotch, mostly."

"Can you hold out for a couple of hours?"

"If I have to." She smiled, and her smile was charming. "You're very thoughtful."

When I got back to the courtroom, the trial was temporarily stalled. The jury had been sent out, and Harvey and the D.A. were arguing in front of the judge's bench. Cave was sitting by himself at the far end of the long attorneys' table. A sheriff's deputy with a gun on his thigh stood a few feet behind him, between the red-draped windows.

Assuming a self-important legal look, I marched through the swinging gate into the well of the courtroom and took the empty chair beside Cave. He looked up from the typed transcript he was reading. In spite of his prison pallor he was a good-looking man. He had a boyish look about him, and the kind of curly brown hair that women are supposed to love to run their fingers through.

But his mouth was tight, his eyes dark and piercing.

Before I could introduce myself, he said, "You the detective Rod told me about?"

"Yes. Name is Archer."

"You're wasting your time, Mr. Archer, there's nothing you can do for me." His voice was a dull monotone, as if the cross-examination had rolled over his emotions and left them flat.

"It can't be that bad, Cave."

"I didn't say it was bad. I'm doing perfectly well, and I know what I'm doing."

I held my tongue. It wouldn't do to tell him that his own lawyer had lost confidence in his case. Harvey's voice rose sharp and strained above the courtroom mutter, maintaining that certain questions were irrelevant and immaterial.

Cave leaned towards me and his voice sank lower. "You've been in touch with her?"

"She brought me into the case."

"That was a rash thing for her to do, under the circumstances. Or don't you know the circumstances?"

"I understand that if she testifies she risks losing her child."

"Exactly. Why do you think I haven't had her called? Go back and tell her that I'm grateful for her concern but I don't need her help. They can't convict an innocent man. I didn't shoot my wife, and I don't need an alibi to prove it."

I looked at him, admiring his composure. The armpits of his gabardine suit were dark with sweat. A fine tremor was running through him.

"Do you know who did shoot her, Cave?"

I have an opinion. We won't go into it."

"Her new man?"

"We won't go into it," he repeated, and buried his aquiline nose in the transcript.

The judge ordered the bailiff to bring in the jury. Harvey sat down beside me, looking disgruntled, and Cave returned to the witness stand.

What followed was moral slaughter. The D.A. forced Cave to admit that he hadn't had gainful employment since his release from the army, that his sole occupations were amateur tennis and amateur acting, and that he had no means of his own. He had been completely dependent on his wife's money since their marriage in 1946, and had used some of it to take extended trips in the company of other women.

The prosecutor turned his back on Cave in histrionic disgust. "And you're the man who dares to impugn the morals of your dead wife, the woman who gave you everything."

Harvey objected. The judge instructed the D.A. to rephrase his "question."

The D.A. nodded, and turned on Cave. "Did you say this morning that there was another man in Mrs. Cave's life?"

"I said it. It was true."

"Do you have anything to confirm that story?"

"No."

"Who is this unknown vague figure of a man?"

"I don't know. All I know is what Ruth told me."

"She isn't here to deny it, is she? Tell us frankly now, Mr. Cave, didn't you invent this man? Didn't you make him up?"

Cave's forehead was shining with sweat. He took a handkerchief out of his breast pocket and wiped his forehead, then his mouth. Above the white fabric masking his lower face, he looked past the D.A. and across the well of the courtroom. There was silence for a long moment.

Then Cave said mildly, "No, I didn't invent him."

"Does this man exist outside your fertile brain?"

"He does."

"Where? In what guise? Who is he?"

"I don't know," Cave said on a rising note. "If you want to know, why don't you try and find him? You have plenty of detectives at your disposal."

"Detectives can't find a man who doesn't exist. Or a woman either, Mr. Cave."

The D.A. caught the angry eye of the judge, who adjourned the trial until the following morning. I bought a fifth of scotch at a downtown liquor store, caught a taxi at the railroad station, and rode south out of town to Mrs. Kilpatrick's beach house.

When I knocked on the door of the redwood cottage, someone fumbled the inside knob. I pushed the door open. The flaxen-haired child looked up at me, her face streaked with half-dried tears.

"Mummy won't wake up."

I saw the red smudge on her knee, and ran in past her. Janet Kilpatrick was prone on the floor of the hallway, her bright hair dragging in a pool of blood. I lifted her head and saw the hole in her temple. It had stopped bleeding.

Her little blue revolver lay on the floor near her lax hand. One shot had been fired from the cylinder.

The child touched my back. "Is Mummy sick?"

"Yes, Janie. She's sick."

"Get the doctor," she said with pathetic wisdom.

"Wasn't he here?"

"I don't know. I was taking my nap."

"Was anybody here, Janie?"

"Somebody was here. Mummy was talking to somebody. Then there was a big bang and I came downstairs and Mummy wouldn't wake up."

"Was it a man?"

She shook her head.

"A woman, Janie?"

The same mute shake of her head. I took her by the hand and led her outside to the cab. The dazzling postcard scene outside made death seem unreal. I asked the driver to tell the child a story, any story so long as it was cheerful. Then I went back into the grim hallway and used the telephone.

I called the sheriff's office first. My

second call was to Frank Kilpatrick in Pasadena. A manservant summoned him to the telephone. I told him who I was and where I was and who was lying dead on the floor behind me.

"How dreadful!" He had an Ivy League accent, somewhat withered by the coastal sun. "Do you suppose that Janet took her own life? She's often threatened to."

"No," I said, "I don't suppose she took her own life. Your wife was murdered."

"What a tragic thing!"

"Why take it so hard, Kilpatrick? You've got the two things you wanted — your daughter, and you're rid of your wife."

It was a cruel thing to say, but I was feeling cruel. I made my third call in person, after the sheriff's men had finished with me.

The sun had fallen into the sea by then. The western side of the sky was scrawled with a childish finger-painting of colored cirrus clouds. Twilight flowed like iron-stained water between the downtown buildings. There were lights on the second floor of the California-Spanish building where Harvey had his offices.

Harvey answered my knock. He was in shirtsleeves and his tie was awry. He had a sheaf of papers in his hand. His breath was sour in my nostrils.

"What is it, Archer?"

"You tell me, lover-boy."

"And what is that supposed to mean?"

"You were the one Ruth Cave wanted to marry. You were going to divorce your respective mates and build a new life together — with her money."

He stepped backward into the office, a big disordered man who looked queerly out of place among the white-leather and black-iron furniture, against the limed-oak paneling. I followed him in. An automatic door closer shushed behind me.

"What in hell is this? Ruth and I were good friends and I handled her business for her — that's all there was to it."

"Don't try to kid me, Harvey. I'm not your wife, and I'm not your judge . . . I went to see Janet Kilpatrick a couple of hours ago."

"Whatever she said, it's a lie."

"She didn't say a word, Harvey. I found her dead."

His eyes grew small and metallic, like nailheads in the putty of his face. "Dead? What happened to her?"

"She was shot with her own gun. By somebody she let into the house, somebody she wasn't afraid of."

"Why? It makes no sense."

"She was Cave's alibi, and she was on the verge of volunteering as a witness. You knew that, Harvey — you were the only one who did know, outside of Cave and me."

"I didn't shoot her. I had no reason to. Why would I want to see my client convicted?"

"No, you didn't shoot her. You were in court at the time that she was shot — the world's best alibi."

"Then why are you harassing me?"

"I want the truth about you and Mrs. Cave."

Harvey looked down at the papers in his hand, as if they might suggest a line to take, an evasion, a way out. Suddenly his hands came together and crushed the papers into a misshapen ball.

"All right, I'll tell you. Ruth was in love with me. I was — fond of her. Neither of us was happily married. We were going to go away together and start over. After we got divorces, of course."

"Uh-huh. All very legal."

"You don't have to take that tone. A man has a right to his own life."

"Not when he's already committed his life."

"We won't discuss it. Haven't I suffered enough? How do you think I felt when Ruth was killed?"

"Pretty bad, I guess. There went two million dollars."

He looked at me between narrowed lids, in a fierce extremity of hatred. But all that came out of his mouth was a weak denial. "At any rate, you can see I didn't kill her. I didn't kill either of them."

"Who did?"

"I have no idea. If I did, I'd have had Glen out of jail long ago."

"Does Glen know?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"But he knew that you and his wife had plans?"

"I suppose he did — I've suspected it all along."

"Didn't it strike you as odd that he asked you to defend him, under the circumstances?"

"Odd, yes. It's been terrible for me, the most terrible ordeal."

Maybe that was Cave's intention, I thought, to punish Harvey for stealing his wife. I said, "Did anybody besides you know that Janet Kilpatrick was the woman? Did you discuss it with anybody?"

He looked at the thick pale carpeting between his feet. I could hear an electric clock somewhere in the silent offices, whirring like the thoughts in Harvey's head. Finally he said, "Of course not," in a voice that was like a crow cawing.

He walked with an old man's gait into his private office. I followed and saw him open a desk drawer. A heavy automatic appeared in his hand. But he didn't point it at me. He pushed it down inside the front of his trousers and put on his suit-jacket.

"Give it to me, Harvey. Two dead women are enough."

"You know then?"

"You just told me. Give me that gun."

He gave it to me. His face was remarkably smooth and blank. He turned his face away from me and covered it with his hands. His entire body hiccuped with dry grief. He was like an overgrown child who had lived on fairy tales for a long time and now couldn't stomach reality.

The telephone on the desk chirred. Harvey pulled himself together and answered it.

"Sorry, I've been busy, preparing for re-direct . . . Yes, I'm finished now . . . Of course I'm all right. I'm coming home right away."

He hung up and said, "That was my wife."

She was waiting for him at the front door of his house. The posture of waiting became her narrow, sexless body, and I wondered how many years she had been waiting.

"You're so thoughtless, Rod," she chided him. "Why didn't you tell me you were bringing a guest for dinner?" She turned to me in awkward graciousness. "Not that you're not welcome, Mr. Archer."

Then our silence bore in on her. It pushed her back into the high white Colonial hallway. She took up another pose and lit a cigarette with a little golden lighter shaped like a lipstick. Her hands were steady, but I could see the sharp edges of fear behind the careful expression on her face.

"You both look so solemn. Is something wrong?"

"Everything is wrong, Rhea."

"Why, didn't the trial go well this afternoon?"

"The trial is going fine. Tomorrow I'm going to ask for a directed acquittal. What's more, I'm going to get it. I have new evidence."

"Isn't that grand?" she said in a bright and interested tone. "Where on earth did you dig up the new evidence?"

"In my own backyard. All these months I've been so preoccupied trying to cover up my own sordid little secret that it never occurred to me that you might have secrets, too."

"What do you mean?"

"You weren't at the trial this afternoon. Where were you? What were you doing?"

"Errands — I had some errands. I'm sorry, I didn't realize you — wanted me to be there."

Harvey moved towards her, a threat of violence in the set of his shoulders. She backed against a closed white door. I stepped between them and said harshly, "We know exactly where you were, Mrs. Harvey. You went to see Janet Kilpatrick. You talked your way into her house, picked up a gun from the table in the hall, and shot her with it. Didn't you?"

The flesh of her face was no more than a stretched membrane.

"I swear, I had no intention — All I intended to do was talk to her. But when I saw that she realized, that she *knew* —"

"Knew what, Mrs. Harvey?"

"That I was the one who killed Ruth. I must have given myself away, by what I said to her. She looked at me, and I saw that she knew. I saw it in her eyes."

"So you shot her?"

"Yes. I'm sorry." She didn't seem to be fearful or ashamed. The face she turned on her husband looked starved, and her mouth moved over her words as if they were giving her bitter nourishment. "But I'm not sorry for the other one, for Ruth.

You shouldn't have done it to me, Rod. I warned you, remember? I warned you when I caught you with Anne that if you ever did it to me again — I would kill the woman. You should have taken me seriously."

"Yes," he said drearily. "I guess I should have."

"I warned Ruth, too, when I learned about the two of you."

"How did you find out about it, Mrs. Harvey?"

"The usual way — an anonymous telephone call. Some friend of mine, I suppose."

"Or your worst enemy. Do you know who it was?"

"No, I didn't recognize the voice. I was still in bed, and the telephone call woke me up. He said — it was a man — he said that Rod was going to divorce me, and he told me why. I went to Ruth that very morning — Rod was out of town — and I asked her if it was true. She admitted it was. I told her flatly I'd kill her unless she gave you up, Rod. She laughed at me. She called me a crazy woman."

"She was right."

"Was she? If I'm insane, I know what's driven me to it. I could bear the thought of the other ones. But not her! What made you take up with *her*, Rod — what made you want to marry that gray-haired old woman? She wasn't even attractive, she wasn't nearly as attractive as I am."

"She was well-heeled," I said.

Harvey said nothing.

Rhea Harvey dictated and signed a full confession that night. Her husband wasn't in court the following morning. The D.A. himself moved for a directed acquittal, and Cave was free by noon. He took a taxi directly from the courthouse to the home of his late wife. I followed him in a second taxi. I still wasn't satisfied.

The lawns around the big country house had grown knee-high and had withered in the summer sun. The gardens were overgrown with rank flowers and ranker weeds. Cave stood in the drive for a while after he dismissed his taxi, looking around the estate he had inherited. Finally he mounted the front steps.

I called him from the gate. "Wait a minute, Cave."

He descended the steps reluctantly and waited for me, a black scowl twisting his eyebrows and disfiguring his mouth. But they were smooth and straight before I reached him.

"What do you want?"

"I was just wondering how it feels."

He smiled with boyish charm. "To be a free man? It feels wonderful. I guess I owe you my gratitude, at that. As a matter of fact, I was planning to send you a check."

"Save yourself the trouble. I'd send it back."

"Whatever you say, old man." He spread his hands disarmingly. "Is there something else I can do for you?"

"Yes. You can satisfy my curiosity. All I want from you is a yes or no."

The words set up an echo in my head, an echo of Janet Kilpatrick's voice. "Two women have died and a third is on her way to prison or the state hospital. I want to hear you admit your responsibility."

"Responsibility? I don't understand."

"I'll spell it out for you. The quarrel you had with your wife didn't occur on the nineteenth, the night she was murdered. It came earlier, maybe the night before. And she told you who the man was."

"She didn't have to tell me. I've known Rod Harvey for years, and all about him."

"Then you must have known that Rhea Harvey was insanely jealous of her husband. You thought of a way to put her jealousy to work for you. It was you who telephoned her that morning. You disguised your voice, and told her what her husband and your wife were planning to do. She came to this house and threatened your wife. No doubt you overheard the conversation. Seeing that your plan was working; you left your loaded shotgun where Rhea Harvey could easily find it and went down to the beach club to establish an alibi. You had a long wait at the club, and later at Janet Kilpatrick's house, but you finally got what you were waiting for."

"Does it seem so funny to you, Cave? You're guilty of conspiracy to commit murder."

"I'm not guilty of anything, old man. Even if I were, there's nothing you could possibly do about it. You heard the court acquit me this morning, and there's a little rule of law involving double jeopardy."

"You were taking quite a risk, weren't you?"

"Not so much of a risk. Rhea's a very unstable woman, and she had to break down eventually, one way or the other."

"Is that why you asked Harvey to defend you, to keep the pressure on Rhea?"

"That was part of it." A sudden fury of hatred went through him, transfiguring his face. "Mostly I wanted to see him suffer."

"What are you going to do now, Cave?"

"Nothing. I plan to take it easy. I've earned a rest. Why?"

"A pretty good woman was killed yesterday on account of you. For all I know you planned that killing the same way you planned the other. In any case, you could have prevented it."

He saw the mayhem in my eyes and backed away. "Take it easy, Archer. Janet was no great loss to the world, after all."

My fist smashed his nervous smile and drove the words down his throat. He crawled away from me, scrambled to his feet and ran, jumping over flowerbeds and disappearing around the corner of the house. I let him go.

A short time later I heard that Cave had been killed in a highway accident near Palm Springs. He was driving a new Ferrari at the time.

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